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Little White Lies

Truth & Movies

THE
ROVER







**WHAT A
THING TO BE
WORKED UP ABOUT
IN THIS
DAY AND AGE**



The Rover

Directed by **DAVID MICHÔD**
Starring **GUY PEARCE, ROBERT PATTINSON, SCOOT MCNAIRY**
Released **15 AUGUST**

DAVID MICHÔD EMERGES FROM THE LION'S DEN AND LEAPS DIRECTLY INTO THE FURNACE FOR HIS BRILLIANT SECOND FEATURE.

REVIEW

There are those who believe that fiction filmmaking naturally smuggles with it the essential truths of documentary. That is, we're watching invented stories and invented characters, but the production itself is a tangible thing that happened in a real place. Each film is a documentary of its own production.

Running with this a little further, the national cinema of Australia furtively tells us a lot about the place and the people. Having never visited the country, it's hard to say with any certainty whether Oz locals ride ramshod though scorched deserts in jumble sale oilskin fetish wear, sporting a rippled sheen of brow-sweat and drinking lager like it's some health-giving elixir. Yet the sheer proliferation of films which appropriate the unforgiving landscape as a way to imagine a time beyond society's inevitable meltdown is telling — perhaps speaking of a widespread sense of fatalistic malaise. If (or even, when) the metropolitan hubs crumble under capitalism, nuclear bombardment, alien skirmish, whatever, where will the survivors live out their remaining days? In the Outback?

With his superb and harrowing second feature, director David Michôd has chosen to grapple with the concept of what happens after the crash. People aren't sifting through the rubble and finding ways to rebuild. They're dropping breezeblocks on one-anothers' skulls to insure their supremacy in the food chain. To sum up, murder is no longer taboo. *The Rover* is set entirely in Australia, though it remains ambiguous as to whether the rest of the world has suffered a similar ignoble decline. China would appear to be doing okay, as rolling stock clambers across the desert daubed in Chinese characters and hauling along sharp-shooters with wrap-around shades. It's never stated, but it seems like Australia is

being divested of its mineral wealth and the remnants of the bug-eyed human population are being left to duke it out Darwin-style.

The film is a wry antecedent to Australian post-new wave classics such as George Miller's *Mad Max* and John Hillcoat's *Ghosts... Of the Civil Dead*. There is perhaps a cynicism to its knee-jerk belief that humanity would naturally gravitate towards savagery in the case of a meltdown (as opposed to, say, a new system based on all-inclusive collectivised mung bean farms). But Michôd really gives the impression that he is taking this material very seriously, and the tone of his apocalypse is one of extreme melancholy and desolation. He films scenes as extended longeurs (occasionally a little too extended). He employs celestial drones on the soundtrack as a shorthand for his country's regression into monotone conflict. He captures people at their lowest ebb who all physically appear to be decomposing in sunlight — a nod to the '70s westerns of Sam Peckinpah.



The concepts of luxury and friendship in this new world have been radically redefined. Cars are hard to come by, and even to leave them alone for a few minutes would be foolhardy. Guy Pearce's moody, brooding Eric is introduced trundling along in a dirt-flecked family saloon, heading down an open road to nowhere. Simultaneously, a gang of hoods are scarpering from an unseen altercation. They've left behind Rey (Robert Pattinson) with a bullet in his gut, and their squabbling results in an accidental auto wreck — one which is staged as an amusing, ironic set-piece.







•

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REVIEW

Eric is slumped over a bar when his beloved car is jacked. The remainder of the film charts his unflagging attempts to reclaim his bust-up property. Eric’s motivations remain a mystery until the final shot of the film.

Finding Rey slumped on the road, Eric swiftly coerces him to become a travelling buddy as it transpires one of the crooks is Rey’s older brother (Scoot McNairy). Eric takes advantage of the mental slowness of his scraggy helpmeet and implants the idea that Rey’s brother left him for dead and that he really should be seeking revenge. The men plot a course for (the apocryphal?) Kaloon, a town where bloody destiny awaits.

There’s something commendably Steinbeckian about *The Rover*, blending as it does an excoriating, dustbowl state of the nation address (per ‘The Grapes of Wrath’) with a tale of mismatched companions, whose simple dreams and objectives are dashed at every hurdle, that feels fondly ripped from ‘Of Mice and Men’. Indeed, Pattinson’s Rey is every bit the Lennie Small to Eric’s George Milton, from soulful campfire vigils in which the whispered philosophical discourse is clearly a case of one-way traffic, to Rey’s small-minded bungling, which often requires them to pack up and move on prematurely (and with destruction in their immediate wake). Eric and Rey’s relationship is beautifully drawn – even though a bond is formed, there’s never a point where you could certifiably call it friendship. It’s far more complex than that.

Having previously dissected the inner workings of a crime family in his 2010 debut *Animal Kingdom*, Michôd here expands his crumbling canvas to imagine an entire nation in which democracy has been replaced by the



way of the gun. It's a slow-burner that seethes with anger and Michôd does everything he can to deglamourise the outpourings of splenetic violence. It's rare that the camera captures death in grisly close-up, or accentuates acts of murder with editing or sound design. One guy, the partner of a friendly female surgeon who tends to Rey's wound, is shown walking up to some parked cars to see what the drivers want. He's instantly shot, close-range, in the head, though Michôd retains a POV perspective from inside the house. The violence here is sudden and banal, and for that reason it is all the more affecting.



Eric's single-minded fury marks the film's emotional core. Michôd wrings a hair-trigger tension not merely from a lawless landscape where human presence signals instant danger, but also in keeping the reasons for Eric's rage tightly under wraps. There's a solitary moment in which his mask is allowed to briefly slip and a corrupted compassion shines through. It's here where the film attains a tacit but meaningful connection back to *Animal Kingdom*, as *The Rover* too is a work concerned with human beings as primal, animalistic beasts. In fact, this time Michôd isn't emphasising a general interchangeability between man and animal, so much as he's saying that man has now reached a status below that of animals.

An important aside sees Rey lounging in the front seat of a car, idly lip-synching to a bouncy pop song. It's a lovely digression, fleshing out a sense of lost innocence which may have existed in Rey before the timeline of the

film, but also reframes a moment which would otherwise seem entirely throwaway as exotic and poetic. Indeed, much of the tragedy of this story derives from incidents which occurred months, years, decades before the events seen here.

Guy Pearce expertly intones a series of existentially-inclined monologues which hint at a hazy dissatisfaction with the world. Yet through one harrowing, late-game episode, we discover that it was a single event which changed everything for him. It's not when murder becomes normalised that social order will break down, it's when social order breaks down that murder will become normalised. *The Rover* is not a hectoring political diatribe bemoaning the way we're all headed. It's a wistful lament for the precious things we'll lose when we finally get there. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Big things were expected of David Michôd following his break-out debut, Animal Kingdom.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Top-drawer work from everyone involved. Pearce and Pattinson shine.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Dark and meaty with a insidious sense of impending doom — Michôd has scaled-up in all departments. Bring on the next one.*

4

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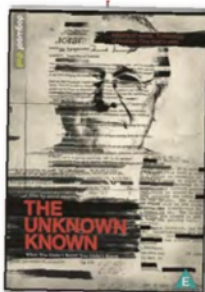
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DON'T HATE ME COZ I'M BEAUTIFUL

INTERVIEW BY SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER STAFFORD

LWLIES SHUTS OUT THE HIGH-PITCHED BOBBYSOXER SQUEALS TO TALK SERIOUSLY WITH ROBERT PATTINSON ABOUT THE FASCINATING SECOND ACT TO HIS STAR-SPANGLED CAREER.

R

obert Pattinson doesn't act like he's conscious of his heartthrob status. Not in *The Rover* and not in life. The 28-year-old Brit speaks quietly, laughs nervously and shuffles his trainers as he processes his thoughts. *LWLies* meets Pattinson the day after the premiere of David Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars* at the Cannes Film Festival. To put it euphemistically, he is not at peak health. Our time is bookended by orders for restorative coke and fries. Fortunately, he is the type to rail against limitations, from the micro (a hangover) to the macro (an industry desperate to define and manipulate his identity).

Like so many of Pattinson's forthcoming projects, David Michôd's moody post-apocalyptic thriller, *The Rover*, is the stylistic and tonal opposite of the blockbusting franchise that remains synonymous with his name. *The Rover* is a continuation of the post-*Twilight* reinvention that became most visible when David Cronenberg cast Pattinson as a Wall Street jackal in 2012's *Cosmopolis*. Two years on and Pattinson is in the unique position of still possessing an enormous amount of star wattage and – it is emerging – defiant art-house inclinations. The question of how far his talent extends and where his true tastes lie are to be resolved in a tantalising dripfeed as his professional future plays out and people either do or don't stop referring to him by a reductive nickname.

PATTINSON: "The Rover is a film which definitely conjures a lot of dread. The first thing I connected to was purely stylistic. I liked the cleanness of the writing and having this situation which was so stark. It was so original, even the way it looked on the page."

What drew Pattinson to David Michôd's follow-up to 2010's *Animal Kingdom* was its clarity of tone rather than the specifics of the story. His co-star, Guy Pearce, has said the on-set atmosphere was heavy – an appreciable comment considering that the collective goal was to conjure a world now bereft of humanity. Presented with this perspective, Pattinson seems surprised.

PATTINSON: "Really?! I thought it was really fun being out in the middle of nowhere. The crew were all staying in the same place as the cast. You never normally get that. As an actor, you usually go to an unfamiliar city and everyone else lives there so they go home and you just go back to your hotel and it's lame. But this meant I was able to hang out with everyone else. It was amazing. I had such a good time."

So it turns out he had a lovely time, partially due to the remoteness of the Australian shoot, but also because of the close-knit nature of the production. Pattinson's character, Rey, does not have such a good time. In a critically wounded state, he is abandoned by his brother, Henry (Scoot McNairy) and then seized by Eric (Pearce) as a means to getting to Henry. The resulting road trip across a barren and murderous land is characterised by a severe power imbalance as the terse and brutal Eric drags Rey about like a human rag doll. Pattinson channelled observations about abusive relationships to play his part.

PATTINSON: "I was interested in that dynamic where a husband is beating up his wife and the wife keeps coming back. The worse the husband is, the more the wife thinks he loves her. There were scenes where I was trying to flirt with Guy. He had no idea. Neither did David. I said half-way through 'You know I'm playing this as a love story?' In one scene when he was kicking me I tried to put my hand up the back of his shorts... It was cut out of the movie."

Another prominent element of Rey's make-up is a slew of vocal and physical tics. He stutters, he stammers, he limps and judders. It's possible to read his character as mentally disabled, but Pattinson thinks Rey's main issue is an extreme lack of a confidence, discomfort in his own skin brought about by a lifetime of bullying.

PATTINSON: "Rey's spent his whole life trying to hide, even inside himself. He doesn't want anyone to really hear him. I imagined those little, slightly annoying dogs that people have spent their whole lives kicking away. He just keeps chasing after people. He hasn't toughened up at all. He's this floppy, mal-coordinated kid. It's a little based on my cousin."

Interviews must be a surreal experience for a man whose private life is under constant scrutiny. He possesses a palpable desire to seem normal, but a diva-ish media black out would be all kinds of wrong, not to mention detrimental to the independent films he would like to see succeed for both his and their sakes. Pattinson has a ready arsenal of thoughts and perspectives on his experiences with the media, freely acknowledging that he has changed tack between fancy-free career beginnings and that dramatic propulsion to a limelight where, for now, he has a permanent resident's pass.

PATTINSON: "I did have a lot of fun at the beginning with interviews. I didn't realise that anyone actually read them so there was no responsibility whatsoever. You're basically trying to tell jokes. And then you realise that people remember and it's written down and they ask you about it after and you start to close down. You don't want people to know who you are. It's just the worst thing that can happen for an actor. It's not even about them knowing who you are, it's people thinking you're a certain kind of thing. When I first started I had so many problems with people thinking, 'Oh he's just a privately-schooled English kid.' No one wanted to give me any diverse parts because of that. Now people don't even think I'm English anymore. That's the *Twilight* baggage. I'm just coming out of that now after four years of having one public persona."

It may take time to persuade the public of his indie movie acting chops, but right now Pattinson couldn't have a more convincing list of directors backing him. It's impressive to see how busy he's been and will continue to be in furthering his career with a series of tantalising collaborations. He's only recently started promoting *The Rover* and *Maps to the Stars*, but has also just finished work on Werner Herzog's Gertrude Bell biopic, *Queen of the Desert*, in which he plays TE Lawrence, and Anton Corbijn's James Dean drama, *Life*. Looking further ahead, there are leading roles in Olivier Assayas' *Idol's Eye*, James Marsh's *Hold on to Me* and Brady Corbet's directorial debut, *The Childhood of a Leader*.

**"NOW PEOPLE DON'T
EVEN THINK I'M
ENGLISH ANYMORE.
THAT'S THE TWILIGHT
BAGGAGE"**

PATTINSON: "I'm basically just trying to recreate my DVD shelf from when I was 17. I've got my list of 20 directors. I've crossed off like nine of them over this year and last! I still wanna get... Who else do I wanna get? Paul Thomas Anderson, because everybody does. Jacques Audiard. Alfonso Cuarón. I want to do a Godard movie. This year I'm doing *Harmony Korine* and *James Gray*, too."

Working with Bavarian legend and existentialist extraordinaire, Werner Herzog, must have been a hoot. We assume that direction was issued in that famous baritone drawl.

PATTINSON: "Yes, it's ridiculous! It's insane because he wrote the script as well and it's one of the most difficult scripts I've ever read. I remember my first scene with Nicole Kidman [who plays Gertrude Bell] it's something about the political situation in Turkey. Werner comes up and he says, 'This line is a joke! Say it as a joke!' And I was like, 'What?! What are you talking about?' And then he just walks off saying, 'It's funny, it's funny.' Nicole said, 'Good luck'. But Werner's great. He's exactly what you'd expect. He's got so many amazing stories. On every single subject, he's got an insider story. He's got this insane confidence as well. I think that's where all his creativity comes from. He's got 100 per cent belief in himself, a little bit like David Cronenberg. So you feel fine to say, 'Yes, I'll just do whatever you say'."

DAVID CRONENBERG IS THE ARTIST PATTINSON CREDITS WITH CATAPULTING HIS CAREER INTO A NEW DIRECTION.

PATTINSON: "Cosmopolis really changed everything for me."

When *New York Times* journalist David Carr asked Cronenberg why he thought 'Rob' could pull off the central role in his solemn postmodern nightmare, the Canadian's deadpan response was, "I'm still not sure". Certainly having Pattinson in a film provides an incentive for backers to finance wildcard productions, but casting opportunism is not the full story as far as this professional relationship is concerned.


Maps to the Stars (set for UK release Autumn 2014) is the duo's second collaboration and it is a wonderful return to the riotous humour that makes Cronenberg's work such a squeamish, insane delight. A limousine, a sex act, and a sex act in a limousine once again form part of Pattinson's character arc. This time, though, he is the driver rather than the passenger. His character, Jerome, is minor: a wannabe actor getting by in Hollywood. Jerome discreetly melds calculation and creative interest allowing himself to be sidelined by the resplendent female psychosis offered by Mia Wasikowska and Julianne Moore.

Music used to be a big deal for Pattinson, who sang 'Never Think' and 'Let Me Sign' on the *Twilight* soundtrack. He plays the guitar and piano. Though he says that interest has waned of late, at least in terms of exposing himself to new sounds.

PATTINSON: "I've got into a little bit of stagnation with music and I don't know why. I've found a few different people recently, but it's weird how you can just stop listening to music sometimes. I don't know. I'm trying to get back into it again now. I used to always listen to music when I was on set and use it for inspiration and I just don't really now. I just listen to rap all the time."

There is a note of hope for those who enjoy Pattinson's dulcet singing voice. One luminous scene in *The Rover* sees Rey sitting alone in a car. Guy Pearce, having gone for a sulky stroll in the Outback, leaves him listening to Keri Hilson's feminist teeny-bopper belter, 'Pretty Girl Rock'. Rey begins singing along, putting maximum feeling into the repetitive, ridiculous lyrics. Michôd stays with this scene until the song is all but over. A prerequisite for this was that his star got to grips with the tricky material.

PATTINSON: "I'd never even heard that song before David played it. I love that Rey would know all the words to that song. It's one of the more embarrassing things, just sitting there and listening to it constantly. I'm so bad at remembering lyrics as well. I just played it over and over in my hotel room. It's so catchy as well, so I was constantly singing it."

One of the catchy lyrics that Pattinson has to trill is "Don't hate me cos I'm beautiful". It's poignant in his guise as the beat-up, brown-toothed Rey and it's a more complicated type of poignant in his off-screen persona of RP, a chiselled A-lister who wants out of the mega stardom bubble. Pattinson is too guarded, savvy and humble to do anything like apologise for playing the hand he's been dealt. His response is something we'll see, not hear. And he will articulate it through the cinema he makes 



THE GRADUATES

FIVE TEEN IDOLS WHO BEAT THE ODDS TO BREAK THE MOULD.



WORDS BY SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN ILLUSTRATIONS BY OLIVER STAFFORD

LEONARDO DICAPRIO

Before *Romeo + Juliet* broke teenage hearts and *Titanic* broke box office records, the wolf of Wall Street and king of the movie world achieved art-house success with stand-out performances in *This Boy's Life*, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* and *The Basketball Diaries*. Post-*Titanic*, DiCaprio has blazed a path that Pattinson would do well to follow, prizing idiosyncratic roles over increased commercial appeal. As well as being Martin Scorsese's current onscreen avatar, DiCaprio has kept his cred up by working with the likes of Woody Allen, Christopher Nolan and Quentin Tarantino.

JAMES VAN DER BEEK

Ah, James Van Der Beek. He may be the most questionable heartthrob on this list, but JVDDB deserves a mention here for the sheer audacity of a choice he made while brainy teen drama *Dawson's Creek* was still on air. With the image of gentle intellectual Dawson at peak prominence, he became a college sociopath, Sean Bateman in *Rules of Attraction*, a(nother) screen adaptation of a Bret Easton Ellis novel about rich kids fucking, taking drugs and respecting nothing. Van Der Beek may have slipped off the radar more recently, but until 2013 he was putting in a delightfully self-mocking performance as himself in axed TV gem, *Don't Trust The B_____ in Apartment 23*.

CHANNING TATUM

A former stripper and Dolce & Gabbana model, there's no doubting it was Channing Tatum's physical charms that first got him noticed. The gentle giant openly credits modelling with providing the financial security that enabled him to make the desired step up to acting. His crossover to the movies began with roles that traded on his brawn (*GI Joe*) or leading man looks (*Dear John*) but it wasn't long before a wounded-puppy style of charisma and

impeccable comic timing got him into bromantic cop comedy, *21 Jump Street*. Next you'll be able to see him under prosthetics in Bennett Miller's *American Dream* debunk, *Foxcatcher*. The critical praise heaped on his rendering of a very serious man suggests we have entered the time of Tatum.

MICKEY ROURKE

Once upon a time it was 1987 and Mickey Rourke was Harry Angel in *Angel Heart*. With a mug to match his character's surname and a devilish Brando-esque sex appeal, Rourke turned on folks already burning from the previous year's erotic drama *9½ Weeks*. In the '90s Rourke left acting to pursue his teenage passion of boxing. The effects of that career move, not least the pummeling he received to that pretty-boy face, took their toll, and when the acting comeback finally surfaced, directors were suddenly harnessing something raw and wounded. Hopefully for Pattinson, the battle will be less labourious, but if he ever turns in a performance as good as Rourke's in *The Wrestler*, the boy will have done good.

JOHN CUSACK

John Paul Cusack established himself in cult '80s rom-coms, most memorably Cameron Crowe's *Say Anything*. Before his baby face and mumbly wit would lock him into one genre, he appeared in crime drama *The Grifters* and has never looked back, playing on his seeming innocence to confuse audiences into rooting for morally ambiguous characters. This is an interesting time for Cusack, who appears with Pattinson in Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars* as a vain, violent, bullshit-peddling spiritualist. As the last vestiges of youth leave his visage, he is choosing increasingly seedy characters. Anyone who has seen *The Paperboy* will know that these days he really will say anything.





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WORK IN PROGRESS





PEARCE

MICHÔD

INTERVIEW BY ADAM WOODWARD

MUTUAL APPRECIATION

DAVID MICHÔD AND GUY PEARCE CANDIDLY REFLECT ON THE SHARED CULTURAL MOTIFS THAT INFORMED BOTH *ANIMAL KINGDOM* AND *THE ROVER*.

INTERVIEW BY ADAM WOODWARD ILLUSTRATION BY LAURÈNE BOGLIO

The coming together of Australia's most exciting young director and one of its best loved actors always promised something special. Yet few could have predicted just how much David Michôd and Guy Pearce's creative relationship would blossom off the back of 2010's *Animal Kingdom*. Shortly after the release of his sensational Melbourne-set crime drama, Michôd began work on his next project, writing one of the lead characters with Pearce in mind and later working closely with him on developing the look and feel of the role. *LW Lies* sat down with the pair at the Cannes Film Festival and, with the aid of some carefully selected images, got them riffing on some of the interests, influences and cultural touchstones that connect them.



Image 1: DAVID MICHÔD

Guy Pearce: Look how clean-cut you look here. We were having a conversation just yesterday about our clothing and how we both feel uncomfortable in shirts, so it's funny that you should show me a picture of David in a shirt. Where are you there?

David Michôd: That was at the Australians in Film event in LA, where I was getting my breakthrough award. It was about the period in my life where I started to notice I had a kind of bulgy right eye. I thought that maybe I had a tumour.

GP: It's not looking so bulgy now. Anyway, David first made contact with me about a year before we did *Animal Kingdom*, so around February 2008.

DM: I remember coming down to Melbourne and meeting you at a cafe in Elwood to talk about the film.

GP: That's right. We had a great chat. I don't think the film was fully off the ground at that time, but I was pretty interested in David — I'd just seen his short film, *Crossbow*, which blew my mind. I remember there was an issue with timing, whether I could do it or not. In fact, I was still doing the play *Poor Boy* when we started shooting. We talked about me having a moustache for *Animal Kingdom*, so I had to tell the people in the play that I was going to be growing this moustache. It didn't go down too well, so we agreed I'd grow a scruffy beard. I grow a beard pretty quickly, so within a week I was doing the play looking like Ned Kelly.

Image 2: GUY PEARCE

DM: Guy's involvement in *Animal Kingdom* was really important. It was my first movie and I had just started to get a sniff in the world that people were interested in the script, but most of the actors with muscular personalities who had attached themselves to it were people I already knew, like Joel Edgerton and Ben Mendelsohn. Guy is obviously a very important Australian actor who was probably getting offers all over the world, and yet he responded to *Animal Kingdom* really quickly, and that gave me a real boost of confidence. It was the first really strong validation that someone out there in the real world of international movie making wanted to see this thing get made.

Image 3: A DOG

DM: I love dogs.

GP: Hmm, me too.

DM: [to *LW Lies*] I know where you're heading with this by the way... Don't think I'm hot on to you. [to Pearce] Are you a cat person at all?

GP: I am. I grew up with cats, but now I'm very much a dog person. I only have dogs now.

DM: I have such a deep, strange emotional connection to dogs. But cats... Nothing. They may as well be pigeons.

GP: The funny thing for us is that our dogs are a bit like cats. We have Basenjis, and they're very odd dogs, they're always cleaning themselves and their barks are more like meows. They climb trees.

DM: I can't even imagine what one looks like...

GP: I'll get Kate [Mestitz, Pearce's wife] to show you her tattoo one day. She's got one tattooed on the back of her arm.

Image 4: MELBOURNE

DM: I grew up in Sydney but I spent my entire twenties in Melbourne. And I'm so glad that I had my twenties in Melbourne because I'm 100 per cent sure that I am an infinitely more interesting person for having lived there. People there are just smarter. I think that's statistically proven.

They're better educated, they're more literate, they're more interested in things generally. Melbourne is one of the coolest cities in the world, and I love how it's protected because of how far away it is from everywhere.

GP: I moved to Melbourne in '85. I've always liked the isolated aspect of it. There's nowhere quite like it.

Image 5: GUY PEARCE IN *THE PROPOSITION*

GP: Ah, the nipple shot.

DM: Did you grow your hair especially for that?

GP: I don't remember. Wait, I was in the middle of taking a year off when the script came and my hair was getting longer anyway. John [Hillcoat] and I had talked about getting extensions and by the time it actually came to making the movie my hair was longer than the extensions, which was a blessing because we were shooting in the desert in 100 degree heat.

DM: I love *The Proposition*. To me it's a really important movie. I remember feeling excited about it long before it was even made, just from the elements that were coming together. You had John Hillcoat, who'd made *Ghosts... Of the Civil Dead*, which blew my little mind when I was in high school; a Nick Cave screenplay; a Nick Cave/Warren Ellis soundtrack; Guy in the lead doing a really dirty, violent, dark western in Australia. I saw when it came out and found it completely intoxicating. In some ways I think it's the most brutal western I've ever seen, and it's the closest thing I think I've seen to a tonal adaptation of something like Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*.

Image 6: GUY PEARCE'S FACIAL HAIR

GP: It's funny, I was talking to someone the other day about going grey, and I was saying that for a long time before my hair started going grey I had a grey beard. I have this weird thing about my beard because it grows really fast.

DM: Insanely fast.

GP: People think that moustache [in *Animal Kingdom*] wasn't real. It's all me.

DM: My memory of it is that I had an idea that you should have a moustache, and when you called me you said you'd been thinking the exact same thing.

GP: That sounds about right. I'm always very eager to muck around with hair as much as I possibly can.

DM: I just remember us both agreeing that there needed to be something slightly unusual about the character.

GP: Yeah, and there was something about what it denotes on a period level. Obviously there's the classic image of the '70s cop with the big handlebar moustache, which almost feels like part of the police uniform.

DM: But maybe not quite so much anymore, which is what I liked about it. It was a little bit anachronistic: here was a guy who was hanging on to something, like you get the sense that maybe his dad was a cop. The other interesting thing is that we set *Animal Kingdom* in an indistinct recent past...

GP: The actual [Walsh Street police shootings] event occurred in '88, right?

DM: That's right, but I couldn't be fussed with the mullets and the giant phones.

Image 7: MEL GIBSON AS *MAD MAX*

DM: Ah, Mel. It's funny how radically the *Mad Max* films changed over the course of the franchise. I can only imagine the new one is so completely crazy that it will be one step beyond *Thunderdome*.

GP: Beyond *Beyond*...

DM: The *Mad Max* films were important films in Australian cinema, you know, coming not long after the whole rebirth of the Australian film industry that gave rise to a number of really important filmmakers. *Mad Max* was the first time that you really got a sense that out of this might also come really great, original genre filmmaking.

Image 8: NED KELLY

DM: You know, I think [*Snowtown* director] Justin Kurzel's working on an adaptation of Peter Carey's 'True History of the Kelly Gang'. It's one of my favourite novels of all time. Australia has this fascinating relationship with its convict past, and I think the culmination of that over the last two centuries is a genuine embrace of anti-authoritarian values in our culture. But also, the more I travel I really feel a strange deference to authority. You know, we want to stick it to The Man but we don't know what to do with ourselves unless The Man's telling us what to do.

GP: Yes, it's like we feel so ruled by The Man that there's this need to fight against the fact it even exists.

DM: Or is it the other way round? We actually like being told what to do so and the idea of rebelling is just something that brings everyone together.

Image 9: THE STONE ROSES' 'SECOND COMING'

DM: Weirdly, I've been thinking a lot over the past few days about Sundance 2010 and how terrifying and exhilarating it was to slip into Park City completely anonymously. No one was paying any attention to me. Then we had our first screening and I remember feeling like my life had changed. It's so different to this. Coming here [to Cannes], I feel scrutinised, like I need to contend with the expectations of other people. And these are expectations which I know I already haven't met, because some people are expecting or want something different to what the film is. But I know can't control that. It's just weird not having that element of surprise.

Robert Wiene's

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari.



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THE OUTLAW



WORDS BY ANTON BITEL

LWLIES TELLS THE STORY OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST MOVIE ICON.

"Such is life." Edward 'Ned' Kelly is reported to have uttered these three words shortly before being hanged in 1880 at the Old Melbourne Gaol. This notorious bushranger, son of an Irish convict, was and remains a divisive presence in Oz history. His long list of crimes included horse and cattle-duffing, assault, bank robbery and murder. And yet he and his family were also unquestionably serial victims of police harassment, trumped-up charges and state abuse of power, which – along with his gentlemanly treatment of hostages – earned Kelly considerable public sympathy. Outlawed after killing several lawmen, he was finally apprehended in a pitched battle with the police at the Glenrowan hotel, during which he and three fellow gangster brethren memorably wore armour and masks of bullet-proof iron.

This history is also a key myth of Australian identity. Regarded by some as a common criminal and by others as a working-class hero, a 'social bandit' and a champion of Irish Catholic resistance against the injustices of the British Protestant establishment, Kelly has become an icon (complete with instantly recognisable costume) of many qualities that make up the national character. He was a larrikin* and a battler, so audacious that his name has entered the proverbial expression, 'as game as Kelly'. His defiant antiauthoritarianism sits well with a populace not given to trusting its own government or constabulary, while his final resignation to fate encapsulates Australia's underdog spirit. It is therefore unsurprising that this controversial, morally ambiguous figure has become a staple of Australian cinema.

The 4000 feet of film that constitutes Charles Tait's *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906) make it the nation's – and the world's – first ever full-length feature film, as well as the first to get banned (in parts of Victoria, for supposedly glorifying its criminal characters). Kelly had now become cinema's first feature (anti)hero, at a time when he was still very much a living memory. His own mother Ellen, alive until 1923, might even have seen the film. Harry Southwell's *The Kelly Gang* (1920) escaped a NSW ban on bushranging films, probably because it opens with an explicit warning against lawbreaking. Becoming a Kelly careerist, Southwell followed this up with *When the Kellys Were Out* (1923), and then the outlaw's first adventure in sound, *When the Kellys Rode* (1934). In 1947, Southwell quit his last attempt at a Kelly picture amid protests from the Kelly descendants, and Rupert Kathner took over, eventually releasing the laughably incompetent *The Glenrowan Affair* (1951).

The bushranger reemerged in Tony Richardson's *Ned Kelly* (1970), this time played by another great countercultural icon and rebel, Mick Jagger. Since then he has been lampooned in Yahoo Serious' *Reckless Kelly* (1993) and Abe Forsythe's *Ned* (2003), lionised by Heath Ledger in Gregor Jordan's *Ned Kelly* (2003), and dissected in countless telemovies. He has also left a trail on the Aussie true-crime feature, from *Chopper* to *The Boys*, and from *Snowtown* to *Animal Kingdom*. For as is life, such is cinema.

*[See page 038 for translation]

THE BUSHMAN



WORDS BY ANTON BITEL

THERE'S MORE TO THE SCREEN IMAGE OF THE BUSHMAN THAN MACHO KNIFE COMPARISON.

Of course, Ned Kelly was also a bushman. This romantic archetype, routinely mythologised and eulogised in the verse of folk poet (and national treasure) Andrew "Banjo" Paterson, embodies the forbearance, self-reliance, resilience and resourcefulness that a life on the land requires, making him a figure on which the city-dwelling middle classes can easily project their fantasies of hardened Australian authenticity. The bushman is a dinky die, ridgy didge, true blue, fair dinkum salt-of-the-earth Ocker, an ex-jackaroo jack of all trades who knows his ropes, can shear a sheep in seconds flat, can break even the most recalcitrant of steeds, and would always rather camp out alone by a billabong than visit the big smoke. He is the kind of character typically played by Chips Rafferty, who died shortly after chillingly deconstructing the role in 1971's *Wake in Fright* – or later by Jack Thompson, who made his big-screen debut in the same film.

The bushman reached a popular peak in George T Miller's *The Man from Snowy River*, a spectacular – if somewhat anaemic – romantic drama adapted from the Paterson poem of the same name, with Thompson appearing as Clancy (of the Overflow), the titular bushman hero of another Paterson poem. It enjoyed the greatest box office success that any Australian film had ever seen, easily outdoing the previous year's *Mad Max 2* (directed by the other George Miller) – until, that is, it was replaced by another, rather different bushman film, Peter Faiman's *"Crocodile" Dundee* in 1986.

Paul Hogan, the writer/star of *"Crocodile" Dundee*, was a popular television comedian who appeared throughout the '80s in a series of tourism advertisements for the US, and beer commercials for the UK. He was selling an image of Australia as unpretentious, unsophisticated, yet hospitable beneath its rough-hewn, leathery exterior. *"Crocodile" Dundee* was merely a feature-length extension of this idea, playing on the cultural clash between a sassy New York city gal and a laconic Aussie bushman. Mick Dundee's bushman legend is at first in question, but gradually revalorised as he proves himself through several manly outdoor activities – mesmerising a water buffalo, choking a snake with his bare hands (it gets lonely in the outback), wrestling a crocodile – and then he finds this same skill set just as useful in the urban jungle of the Big Apple, even confronting a mugger with the Freudian line, "That's not a knife..." as he draws his own huge croc-skinning blade.

The film did well at home, but it offers, via its resurrected bushman, an image of Australia very much packaged for foreign audiences and destined to induce cultural cringe amongst the locals. So Greg McLean made amends in 2005 with *Wolf Creek* – a truth-twisting *Wake in Fright* for the torture porn set – in which John Jarratt's not-so-jolly bushman, also named Mick, reprises Dundee's "That's not a knife..." line in a context designed to put tourists off coming to Australia for life.




AS TOLD TO ADAM WOODWARD

DAVID GULPILIL IS AUSTRALIA'S MOST RECOGNISABLE INDIGENOUS STAR. HERE, *CHARLIE'S COUNTRY* DIRECTOR ROLF DE HEER REVEALS THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS ABORIGINAL ICON.

David is without question the preeminent Indigenous actor. He's one of the very best actors I've ever worked with, an astonishing combination of incredible instinctiveness and deep intellect. David was plucked from obscurity as a 16-year-old dancing kid by Nicolas Roeg, and because he's as good as he is, he's fundamentally helped shape Australian cinema. More than anyone else, he's opened up the notion of Aboriginal stories and the need to tell them. But his significance goes beyond that. Because of David's incredible talent, he has inspired filmmakers like myself to write about indigenous issues. He opened up the possibilities of what stories could be told.

I cast David in *The Tracker* without having met him. He was doing *Rabbit-Proof Fence* at the time and happened to be passing through town, so I got the chance to meet him. To my shock and horror I could barely understand anything he said, and I had nothing to say to him because I didn't have the slightest cultural connection with him. I thought, 'How am I gonna direct this guy about whom I know nothing?' Luckily, at the end of that meeting he invited me to his homeland, Maningrida. It's very remote – 500 kilometers east of Darwin – but I decided to make the trip. I later found out that he asks everyone he works with, but I was the first one to accept his invitation. It was the best thing I could have done. We shared experiences that were interesting and profound

and funny. He still talks about the time we went spear fishing and I lent him my Polaroid sunglasses – he caught 30 fish in 30 minutes. That was one of the most incredible things I've ever experienced, and it really helped in terms of gaining David's trust. I've ended up making three films with him.


Australia had a pretty limited film industry up until the early '70s, which is when David emerged. His first film, *Walkabout*, was not really an Australian film, but his emergence around that time marked a change in attitude towards Indigenous people on screen. Before that we had *Jedda*, which as the first film to star two lead Aboriginal actors is an aberration if nothing else. Then we had *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, which in my opinion is one of the greatest films ever made, but because it failed to fire at the box office it became conventional wisdom that films with Indigenous themes couldn't work. It was a real step back, even though it was such a great film. When the industry finally took off in the '70s, there was a lot of work behind the scenes by the Australian Film Commission, when it still existed, and various Indigenous groups who were taking initiatives to tell their own stories. Nowadays that hard work is being continued by films like *Samson and Delilah*. Indigenous films still need protection, but there are protocols in place now, which is important because sometimes you have people with all the best intentions who charge in and make a mess 

"I'm two people," says director Ivan Sen, describing the internal 'conversations' that allow him, as both location scout and screenwriter, to match real landscapes to the more symbolic spaces of his scripts, adapting both accordingly. For example, his latest film, *Mystery Road* (reviewed on p65), was originally written to be set in the New South Wales cotton-growing country where Sen himself grew up, and where his 2002 feature debut *Beneath Clouds* was shot. "We're funny, Indigenous people," he explains. "We're quite territorial in how we think about expressing ourselves. When I'm writing something, I don't feel I have to be writing about people around Uluru or people in the central desert or something like that. But that's something I've actually had to grow out of, or push myself out of." So he found in Central Queensland's cattle country a location far from his own roots, and "made it change to more of a western."

Divided selves, uprooted lives – these themes run through Sen's features, and his family history. *Beneath Clouds*, for example, "explored a young girl who's Indigenous but also Irish in ancestry. She was highly reflective of my own childhood where I had an absent European father and did not really fit in with the Aboriginal family which was my immediate surroundings. *Mystery Road* also involves a character who doesn't belong to either culture, but has to work within the fabric of it. A 'native trooper' or the 'black tracker' is someone from the past I've identified with. It's something that's affected a lot of Indigenous people in the world at the moment of colonisation when you have to work against your people and also for the invaders. That identity crisis is probably the ultimate form of it. [Indigenous police detective] Jay in *Mystery Road* has to deal with similar issues."

Meanwhile, the northern NSW community which gives Sen's 2011 second feature, *Toomelah*, its title, and which is where Sen's mother was born and raised, is a similar microcosm of the ethnic and cultural divisions engendered by colonialism. "It's a focused area which has brought together Indigenous clans from two different tribal groups. My grandmother is from one group, my grandfather is from the other group. From the '30s there were systematic programmes in place by the NSW government to eradicate all culture within the groups at Toomelah, so the language and the dances – everything to do with the culture – was systematically eradicated during the '50s and '60s. *Toomelah* is a representation of the mess that's left over from that."

As Sen's films repeatedly demonstrate, that historical mess remains an open wound inscribed in the Australian landscape. "The past hasn't disappeared for us," he says, "it's all buried under the topsoil – literally." Sen reveals that mere kilometres away from Toomelah, "a massacre site was uncovered about 20 years ago", while *Beneath Clouds* prominently features "a place near where I grew up called Black Mountain, which was a site of a huge massacre, where the local farmers got together to herd about 80 men, women and children off a cliff face."

Sen is also torn between the need to express his own Indigenous experience, his love of art-house abstraction in his (unreleased) Nevada-set feature *Dreamland*, and his passion for genre cinema. With plans for "a science-fiction action romance" and another story for Jay ("not" Sen insists "a sequel or anything"), Sen's latest conflict of identities, already detectable in *Mystery Road*, is "finding that self-expression within the fabric that's more commercial and more viable for a big audience." 

GENRE AND GENOCIDE

WORDS BY ANTON BITEL

THE DIRECTOR OF *MYSTERY ROAD*
SPEAKS TO *LWLIES* ABOUT THE REALITIES
OF REPRESENTING AUSTRALIA'S
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ON FILM.

MISSING!!! HAVE YOU SEEN

YAHOO SERIOUS?



A SHOCK-HAIRED AUSTRALIAN GAGMAN TOOK HOLLYWOOD BY STORM IN THE 1980S BEFORE DISAPPEARING INTO OBLIVION. *LWLIES* INVESTIGATES THE CURIOUS CASE OF YAHOO SERIOUS.

WORDS BY ADAM LEE DAVIES

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There was a dreamtime in the '80s when the pop culture relief map turned upside down. Tired, perhaps, of Thatcher, Reagan and the Cold War, the world briefly shunned East and West and instead looked South to the boozy, breezy, easy-going charms of our Australian cousins. For a blissful period, it seemed that everybody everywhere was sucking down Foster's and Castlemaine XXXX as INXS and Men at Work blasted out of car stereos and genial daytime soaps like *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* dribbled from our TV sets.

Up on the big screen, Aussie directors such as Bruce Beresford and Peter Weir were hoovering up Oscars. Meanwhile, "*Crocodile*" Dundee and Mel Gibson [ver1.0] had the worldwide box-office sewn up tighter than a wallaby's pocket. But where among all these slick, marketable exports was there evidence of the true Outback spirit? Where was the renegade, the larrikin, the uncouth, iconoclastic blunderer with mischief in his heart, a glint in his eye and two fingers up to the rest of the world? Also, where were the thundering clichés, the disingenuous philistinism, the swellheaded presumptuousness and the dopey schoolyard humour? Enter stage left: Yahoo Serious.

Looking like an acid house wannabe who's been digitised down into a character for an early SNES game and then back into human form, Serious arrived from nowhere in 1988 with *Young Einstein*, the tale of unassuming/feeble minded Tasmanian apple farmer, Bert Einstein (Serious), who first split the beer atom (with a chisel), invented rock 'n' roll, popularised big-wave surfing, romanced Marie Curie and saved Paris from nuclear annihilation by channelling the radioactive overspill from a runaway fusion reactor through his home-made electric guitar. Bonzer!

A former art student ("I ended up making a hot-dog machine, putting four people inside and calling it an artwork – it was a disaster") and documentary-maker, the shock-haired™ Serious evolved into a one-man cottage industry. He wrote, produced and directed a rudimentary but complete version of *Young Einstein* that stirred much interest among the Hollywood cognoscenti. Indeed, so enamoured were Warner Bros with the original cut that they immediately snapped it up and demanded an hour's-worth of new footage be shot, a wholesale re-edit performed, a new score added and that the ending be changed. The resulting movie is – like Serious himself – innocent, goofy, inventive and easy on the eye. It is also juvenile, obvious, gloopy in both pace and sentiment and ultimately over-reliant on its star's 'Gormless Galoot' schtick.

Serious, (real name: Greg Pead) cited artists as diverse as Buster Keaton, Prince, Marcel Duchamp and Woody Allen as inspirations in his attempts to create a genre of cinema he described as "*Lawrence of Arabia* meets Bugs Bunny." And, to be fair, he can claim some odd form of pyrrhic victory in this. *Young Einstein* does indeed look fabulous, especially early scenes in the Australian desert which have that beaten-aluminium tang of *Mad Max 2* about them. And the humour is – as per the Serious Manifesto – unwaveringly cartoonish, just not in any way that will appeal to anyone over the age of eight. Bugs and co's breakneck pratfalling and kaleidoscopic violence was balanced by a sly wit, fierce zingers and a kinky nightmare logic. Serious reduces their elegantly deranged comic perversity to simply falling over

things, into things and out of things. Windows are his speciality. And everything comes complete with accompanying slide-whistle sound effects.

But the film did big business. The wackadoo premise, eye-catching poster campaign and snappy trailer tempted many, and *Young Einstein* performed a box-office smash'n'grab in cinemas across Australia and Europe. And although the US was not to be wholly swayed by this guileless stew of anachronistic effrontery, 19th century particle physics and Old World stodginess (who knew?), Serious had delivered a solid global hit and Warner Bros were impressed enough to stump up big coin for his next film, 1993's *Reckless Kelly*. This was a passion project about the great Australian folk hero Ned Kelly. It would be his 'In Utero'. His *Magnificent Ambersons*. His Waterloo.

Serious plays the famed Aussie outlaw's modern-day descendent, a blow-dried Robin Hood manque who robs from the rich, abhors violence and can't resist a lame sight-gag. This was Yahoo's Mickey Rourke phase – all salon-scruffy hair, motorbike leathers and store-bought martyrdom. A clearly studio-mandated plot insists that Kelly must take leave of the booze, 'roos and didgeridoos and head to Hollywood to make the fortune he needs to save his homestead. But this is merely an excuse for Serious to disarm uptight, modish Yanks with his no-wuckers Outback horse-sense and down-home whimsy. He also shoehorns in some blue-sky musings on both gun control and climate change, thereby ensuring the film's across-the-board US box-office success.

It's doubtful that co-stars Hugo Weaving and Alexei Sayle would wish too many people were reminded of *Reckless Kelly*, but they need not worry. It flopped and then disappeared. Reviews are rare, interviews non-existent. It's as if Serious was being given a pure dose of the silent treatment. He'd caught lightning in a bottle with *Young Einstein*, but this time he – and some major studio cash – had gotten badly burnt.

Worse was to follow in 2000 with *Mr Accident*, the very definition of a career footnote. Ditching high-concept for no-concept, Serious fires all his remaining guns at once into the baffling, scattershot, infantile tale of a clumsy factory repairman hooked on nicotine-laced eggs. He battles a refrigerator-obsessed baddie to discover the true quantum nature of the universe within the hubcap of a VW Beetle. Mucky jokes and busy innuendo bump uglies with pre-school monkeyshines and primary-hued sanctimony in a film that's much less fun and far less strange than it sounds.

And that was that – and then some. For most people, Serious has since overshot the 'Where Are They Now?' file and landed in the bin marked 'I Don't Know What That Is'. No ironic reappraisal for Yahoo. No stunt cameos in Hollywood movies. The closest he's come to mainstream recognition during the intervening years was a gag in *The Simpsons* in which Lisa, seeing a boarded up movie theatre bearing the sign 'Yahoo Serious Festival', says, "I know those words, but that sign makes no sense." A little cruel and a little sad, but fair enough. For a brief, glorious and utterly mystifying moment, though, he was king of the world. And how many of us can say that?

THE AUSTRALIAN GENRE FILMS THAT TIME (ALMOST) FORGOT.



Ozploitation essentials

MARK HARTLEY'S 2008 DOCUMENTARY, *NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD: THE WILD, UNTOLD STORY OF OZPLOITATION!* REVEALED TO THE WORLD ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S BEST KEPT SECRETS: A RUN OF BIG, BRASSY LOW-BUDGET DRIVE-IN FILLERS FROM THE '70S AND '80S. *LW LIES* PICKS FIVE OF THE FINEST.



LITTLE WHITE LIES PRESENTS

IN **COLOR**

LONG WEEKEND • THIRST • TURKEY SHOOT • FAIR GAME • DARK AGE
PRODUCED BY **LITTLE WHITE LIES** WRITTEN BY **ANTON BITEL** ILLUSTRATED BY **JAMES WILSON** DIRECTED BY **TIMBA SMITS** AUSSIE RULES SPECIAL

Long Weekend

– 1978 –

Every movement needs a scribe, and many of the most memorable Ozploitationers – *Patrick* (1978), *Harlequin* (1980), *Road Games* (1981), *Razorback* (1984) – came from the the pen of one man, Everett de Roche. De Roche's finest script, *Long Weekend*, is a fish- (or dugong-)out-of-water freakout in which a bickering urban couple's trip to an isolated bushland beach ends in natural(ish) disaster.

Clearly it is the couple's many transgressions against their environment that cause the local flora and fauna to rebel in repeated acts of nature's revenge. But these are also underpinned by a psychological subtext, as the savage Australian wilderness mirrors all the bitter dysfunction in these city slickers' self-destructive relationship. From the moment, near the beginning, that Peter (John Hargreaves) half-jokingly places Marcia (Briony Behets) in the cross-hairs of his new gun, there is an inevitable ending in sight, no matter how irrationally it is reached or how lost Peter and Marcia become trying to follow the arrow-like direction markers inscribed in the bark of surrounding trees. The sheer overdetermination of the plotting engenders an uncanny ominousness throughout, making this ecological apocalypse too genuinely creepy to be ridiculous.

Thirst

– 1979 –

"There's a legacy, isn't there?" says Kate Davis (Chantal Contouri), after the well-dressed strangers who have just drugged and abducted her reveal that she is the last remaining descendant of Countess Elizabeth Bathory. Modern middle-class Kate imagines her captors are after a family inheritance, when really they want to tap into the purity of her bloodline. In *Thirst*, the real legacy belongs to the high gothic of the traditional vampire film, here referenced in the opening dungeon-set sequence before being updated and relocated to the colonies, with old-world vested interests seeking to reassert their control over the new world's bovine proletariat.

As different factions within an elite club of mortal bloodsuckers compete to win wilful Kate over to their 'noble' cause, Rod Hardy's film shows the way that we are all socially conditioned to accept our place in long-established hierarchies. It is a bizarrely inventive spin on the vampire mythos, anticipating the class satire of Brian Yuzna's *Society* as much as the undead food chain of the Spierig brothers' *Daybreakers*. Of course there will be blood, but there is also Brian May's wonderfully bombastic orchestral score, and some truly hallucinatory slaughterhouse imagery.

Turkey Shoot

– 1982 –

It takes either a certain self-awareness, or a complete lack thereof, to include the word "turkey" in a film's title. That may in part explain why *Turkey Shoot* has picked up the alternative monickers *Escape 2000* and *Blood Camp Thatcher* – but we can probably give the benefit of the doubt to its writer/director Brian Trenchard-Smith, Ozploitation's crowned king of shameless genre crackpottery (*The Man from Hong Kong*, *Dead End Drive-In*).

Perhaps cinema's tawdriest ever anti-Thatcherite allegory (Michael Craig's despotic villain is named Thatcher), this escapist dystopian fantasy borrows its story of a state-sanctioned (wo)manhunt of social 'deviants', as well as its rebellious anti-authoritarian stance, from Peter Watkins' *Punishment Park* (1971) – but, caught up in the thrill of the chase, it quickly loses sight of any more thoroughgoing political analysis.

"Excess is what makes life worth living," says one of the film's more despicable sadists, before adding, "for people like us." As Trenchard-Smith keeps us entertained by flinging all the exploito-scuzz (brutality, rape, human hunting, even a mutant monster!) he can at innocent international star Olivia Hussey, the director seems to be asking us too just what kind of deviants we are.

Fair Game


– 1986 –

Three professional kangaroo hunters invade the Outback wildlife sanctuary run by Jessica, and after a series of escalating confrontations, decide that she might make more entertaining quarry. If Mario Andreacchio's action thriller shares with *Turkey Shoot* a considerable debt to *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), its punning title points to a newly gendered focus, with male predators and female prey. Played by Linda Hamilton-lookalike Cassandra Delaney, Jessica is indeed fair, and the film's key image of her bound, half-naked and spread-eagled, to the bonnet of a speeding ute, reduces her to both sexual victim and animal trophy. Yet, as sure as revenge follows rape, Jessica will turn the tables on her toolled-up tormentors.

The conflict that this film stages between conservation and the right to hunt is still very much a live issue in Australia's political landscape today – but Andreacchio's principal concern is to play cat and mouse with borrowed genre tropes. One almost entirely unnecessary stunt-filled car chase sequence near the beginning crams into its few short minutes separate references not just to other Ozploitation fare like *Mad Max 2* (1981) and *Road Games* (1981) but also, incredibly, to *Jaws* (1975) – without ever leaving the dust-blown highway.

Dark Age

– 1987 –

Speaking of *Jaws*, Arch Nicholson's *Dark Age* borrows a celebrated dolly zoom from that film to show the alarm on an onlooking character's face as a Northern Territory beach comes under monstrous attack. It would be all too easy to dismiss – or else just to embrace – *Dark Age* as pure croc schlock, but the gigantic reptilian throwback that surfaces here is expressly identified as Numunwari, a sacred Aboriginal animal, allowing this creature feature to accommodate all manner of Indigenous issues. As poachers try to bag the outsized 'saltie', as tribal elders seek to protect it, and as officials want to destroy it, local Ranger and 'croc lber' Steve Harris (John Jarratt) must find a compromise between Aboriginal tradition and colonial rapacity if he is to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. There is also a completely gratuitous sex scene – but hey, it was the '80s... 

THE END OF TIME

AS TOLD TO DAVID JENKINS

JOHN HILLCOAT, THE ACE AUSTRALIAN DIRECTOR BEHIND
THE PROPOSITION AND *THE ROAD*, EXPLAINS HIS OBSESSION
WITH THE TOTAL ANNIHILATION OF PLANET EARTH.

I've never met or heard of anyone who hasn't been shaken by the experience of going into the Outback. I've travelled a lot. I've been to deserts in Africa and America, various harsh terrains. But Australia is unique. It's primeval. Every continent has their own Indigenous flora and fauna, but there's a lot more commonality with the rest of the world when compared to Australia. It's like the Arctic. It really does feel like either the beginning of time or the end of time.

If you look at the films made in the Outback, they tend to be nightmares. In Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright*, you see the Outback as this hellish place, and the people who live there are misfits and tyrants. Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout*, too, has this sense of romantic mystery and awe, but it still kicks off with a father tipped over the edge who drives his kids into the Outback in order to kill them.

There was a huge resistance to my film, *The Proposition*, being made in Australia. It has since been very well received, but initially the script and the approach were rejected because our view of history was considered too harsh. It was also during a period where genre cinema was frowned upon. This was the peak of the little Aussie underdog film, things like *The Castle*, *Muriel's Wedding* and *Strictly Ballroom*. They're all really well made, but there were endless versions of those. It has changed now – you now have films like *Snowtown*, and you have Indigenous filmmakers doing things like *Sampson and Delilah*, which I was blown away by. The period from *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead* through to *The Proposition* was an impossible time for me as a filmmaker. It sent me into exile.

But that wasn't always the case. I'll never forget seeing the first two *Mad Max* films. It was an inspiring time. The first *Mad Max* came off the back of the first proper new wave of Australian cinema in the '70s. There was a surge of creativity, but these filmmakers were also celebrating genre. There were all these horror movies (see *Ozplotation Essentials* on p22), and *Mad Max* came out of the drive-in B-grade film tradition.

There's a new *Mad Max* film with Tom Hardy and Charlize Theron on its way. They has an opportunity to radically reinterpret the post-apocalyptic theme of that franchise, because there were these freak floods in the area where they were going to be filming.

The desert was suddenly covered with these beautiful wild flowers. So, of course, they ended up moving the shoot to Africa. It would've made it into a utopian comedy. There would've been a great irony in seeing these gnarly guys in leather with their makeshift machines, tearing up fields of flowers.

There were a lot of American films which used Australia as a setting during the '80s and '90s. They even built big studios in Queensland and Sydney. The country became a backlot for Hollywood. The crew that came out of those first films soon realised that they got paid two-to-three times the amount to make an American film. Then there were changes in tax breaks and government policy. As soon as the dollar started to strengthen, they all packed their bags and went to New Zealand and other places. So there went from being 50 Australian films being made a year to less than five.

My personal interest in the apocalypse stems from before that, from the films of the '70s. I was raised in America from the age of four to 17. It was a time of huge crisis. The utopian ideals of the '60s were being stomped on and people were becoming radicalised. There was the birth of modern terrorism and the media. There was an economic crisis, energy crisis, the president was impeached, there was the loss of the Vietnam war, which was a public war. In my house, the TV was on all the time. I remember seeing all those assassinations, whether it was Martin Luther King or the Kennedys. I was just seeing images of death from a very young age. Kids my age with their skin melted from napalm, right there in my living room.

It was an era of despair. The punk movement rose up as a response to this. And that spread into movies. In England, there was a kind of environmental meltdown. The cultural atmosphere was charged and people were just looking hard at the darkest aspects of culture and humanity. That's what produced so many stunningly brave films. For me, it marked the renaissance of American filmmaking. I went back to Australia with all that in my head. The disenchantment and the frustration with leaders, the economy and politics had filtered across the Western world. There is a nihilism to the punk movement which can be seen in *Mad Max*. It's that nihilism that's key to the apocalypse. Apocalypse is the ultimate form of nihilism.



STRINE SLANG FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAVELLER

STRINE

ALKIE
 ARSE ABOUT FACE
 AUSSIE SALUTE
 BASTARD
 BLUE
 BONZER, MATE
 BROWN-EYED MULLET
 BUILT LIKE A BRICK SHITHOUSE
 CHUCK A WOBBLY
 CRACK ONTO
 DON'T GET YOUR KNICKERS IN A KNOT
 DUNNY
 FAIR CRACK OF THE WHIP!

 FRANGER
 FRECKLE
 HOON
 LARRIKIN
 LEMON
 LIQUID LAUGH
 MOLLYDOOKER
 MULL
 MYSTERY BAG
 OLD FELLA
 PASH
 PIG'S ARSE!
 PLONK
 POMMY
 RACK OFF, HAIRY LEGS!
 ROADIE
 ROOT
 ROOT RAT
 SANGA
 SHARK BISCUIT
 SHEEPHAGGER
 SPUNK
 THONGS
 USEFUL AS TITS ON A BULL
 WITHIN COO-EE
 WOWSER
 YOBBO

ENGLISH

Dipsomaniac
 Back to front
 Motion used to brush away flies
 A term of endearment amongst 'mates'
 Fisticuffs; also, term of address for a red-head
 Bravo, my friend
 Faecal matter floating in seawater
 Strapping
 Throw a tantrum
 Court enthusiastically
 It's not worth it
 Basic outdoor convenience
 I should like to take my turn now, please.
 (cf. Fair suck of the sav!; Fair go, mate!)
 Prophylactic
 Fundament
 Joyrider
 Originally, a hoodlum; now, a rowdy prankster
 Lesbian (n.)
 Vomit (cf. Technicolor yawn; pavement pizza)
 A left-handed person
 Marijuana
 Sausage (cf. snag)
 Penis
 Snog
 We'll have to agree to disagree
 Cheap wine
 Bastard person of English origins
 Please leave immediately
 Takeaway beer
 Engage in sexual intercourse with
 A lecher
 A sandwich
 Surfing novice
 Person of New Zealand origins
 Good-looking person
 Flip-flops
 Not very useful
 Nearby
 Spoilsport
 Uncouth person

TRANSLATIONS BY ANTON BITEL



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A POST-APOCALYPTIC MOVIE POSTER SPECTACULAR

TIME *apocalypse* TIME

Movie lore says that when the destruction of the planet finally arrives, it will come with fireworks, barter towns, scorched CG vistas and zombie Bill Murray.

With the end of days approaching, *LWLies* handed 10 illustrators their final mission orders: to offer a naive take on the cinematic apocalypse and save the world from total annihilation.

FEATURING
ARTWORKS

BY

DAVID DORAN
LUKE BROOKES
TIMBA SMITS
SAM BREWSTER
LAURÈNE BOGLIO
SARAH CLIFFORD
ESME LONSDALE
LAUREN HUMPHREY
MICHAEL PARKIN
OLIVER STAFFORD

CURATED BY TIMBA SMITS



CHILDREN OF MEN (2006)
ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID DORAN



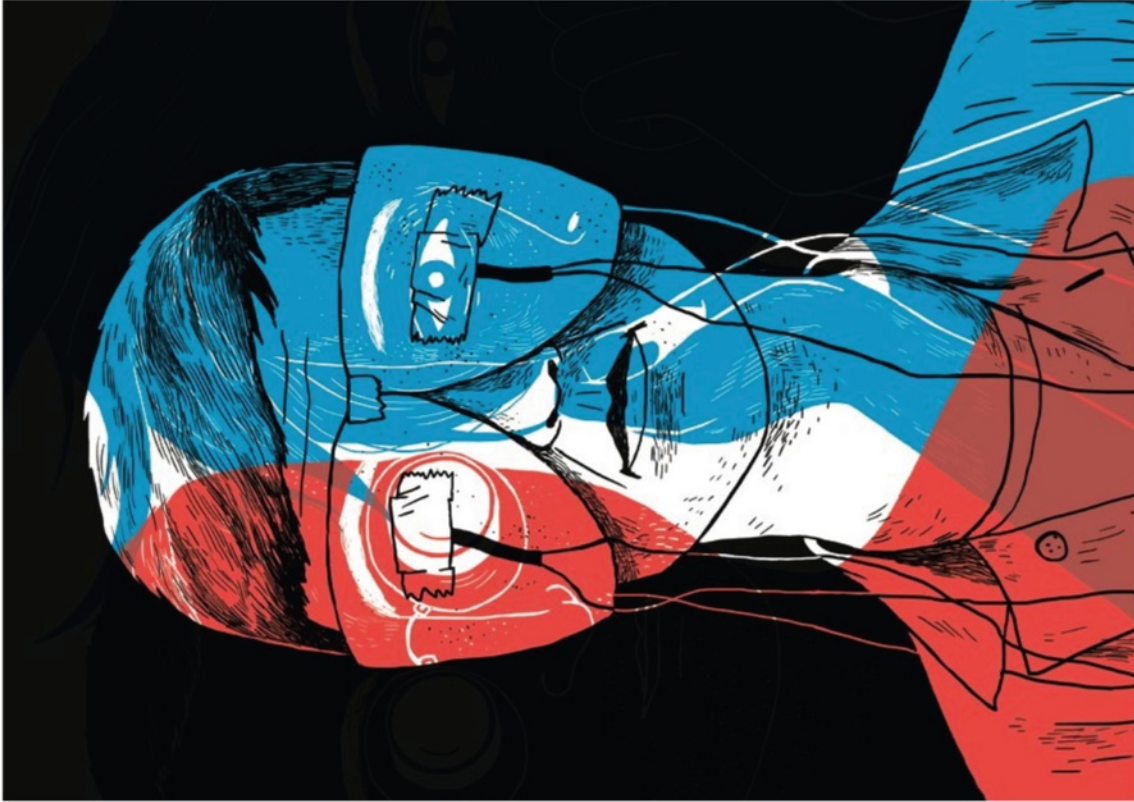
MAD MAX (1979)
ILLUSTRATED BY LUKE BROOKES

DREDD (2012)
ILLUSTRATED BY TIMBA SMITS



TIME OF THE WOLF (2003)
ILLUSTRATED BY SAM BREWSTER





LA JETÉE (1962)
ILLUSTRATED BY LAURÈNE BOGLIO

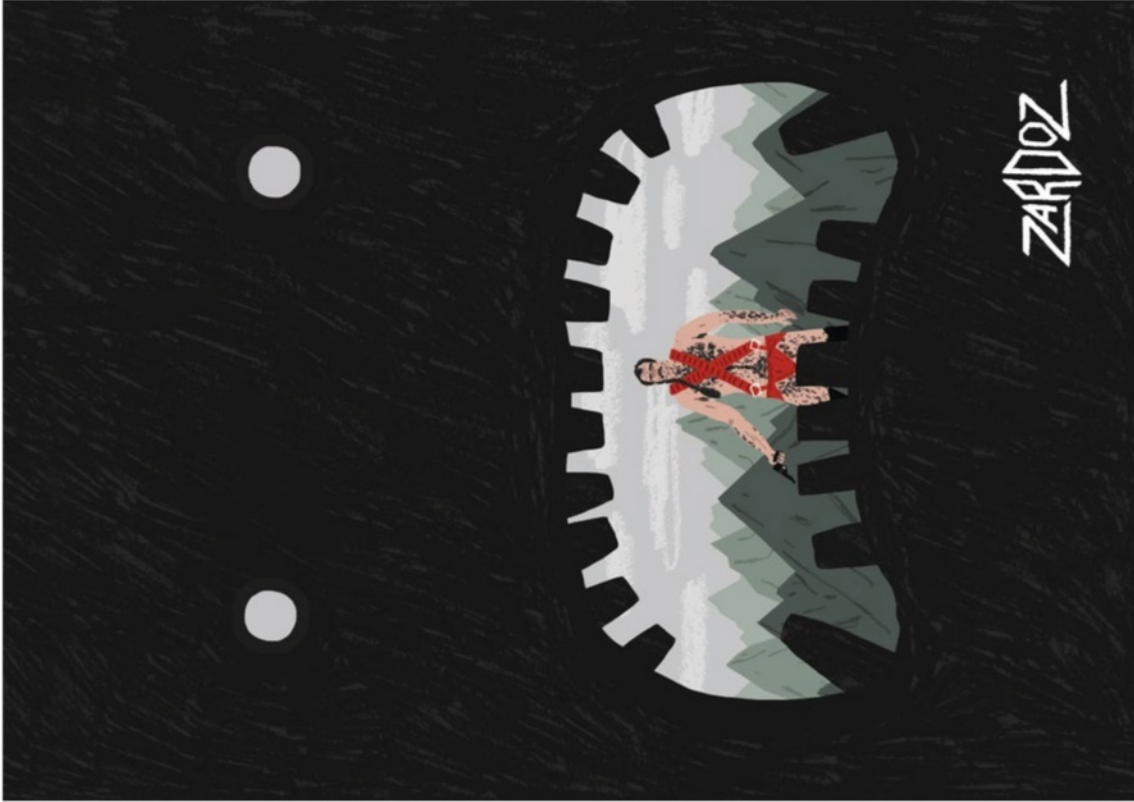


WATERWORLD (1995)
ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH CLIFFORD

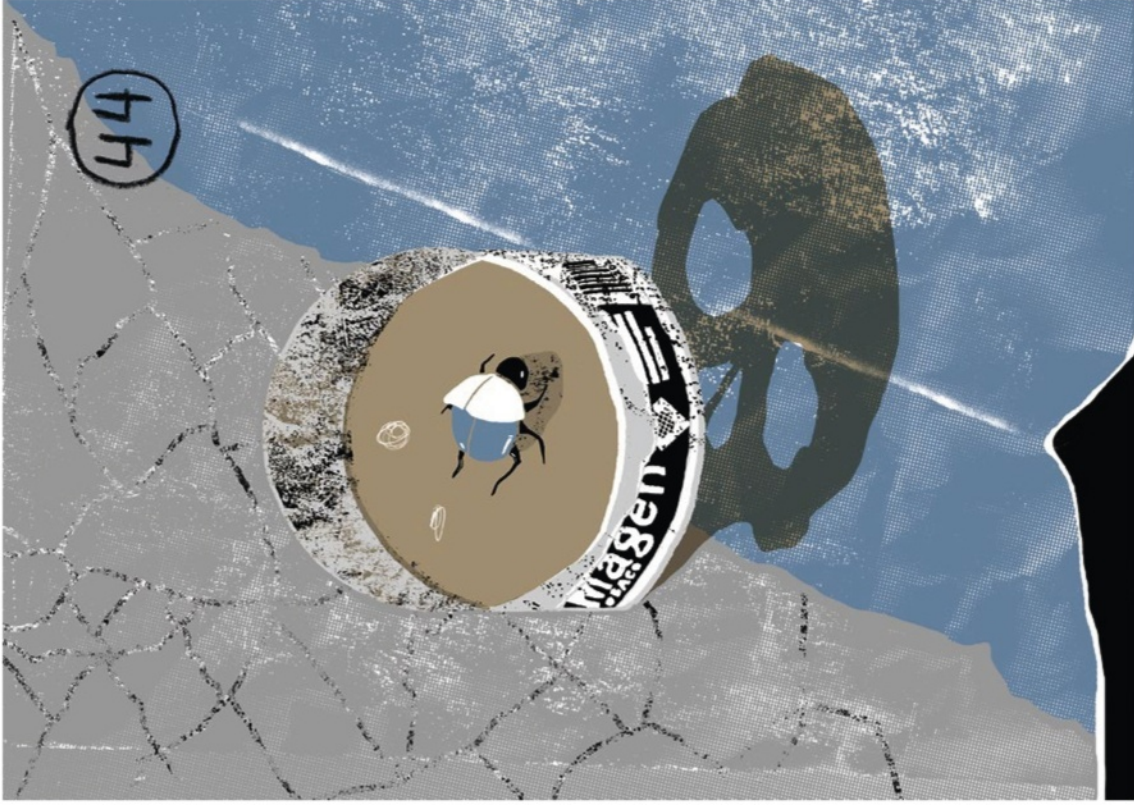
ZOMBIELAND (2009)

ILLUSTRATED BY LAUREN HUMPHREY





ZARDOZ (1974)
ILLUSTRATED BY MICHAEL PARKIN



THE ROAD (2009)
ILLUSTRATED BY OLIVER STAFFORD



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Palm
Dog

Cannes 2014

Four *LW Lies* writers recall their highlights from the world's biggest, brassiest movie extravaganza..

Dog Days

Each year the great and good of the film industry come together to celebrate a different breed of talent. Undisputedly Cannes' highest and most fiercely contested accolade, the Palm Dog recognises the outstanding contribution to cinema by a canine among the festival's official selection. It's an endearingly offbeat award that, surprise surprise, was started by a Brit back in 2001 and has since grown into an internationally recognised showcase of mutt might. Some truly memorable pooches have bounded off with the coveted leather collar — from Lucy in *Wendy and Lucy* to *The Artist's* Uggie to Baby Boy in *Behind the Candelabra*. Proving that the Nouvelle Vag is in fine health, this year's winner was Hungarian director Kornél Mundruczó's *White God*, which sees no less than 250 hounds unite in a *Spartacus*-esque uprising against their cruel human oppressors. Seeing the film's central canine star wag his way up the red carpet in a fetching black bowtie was undoubtedly one of the highlights of this or any other Cannes. **ADAM WOODWARD**

Goosebumps

Everybody gets them for different reasons. For me, the sensation usually strikes during a transcendent scene of a great movie witnessed amid the delirious madness of a film festival. It doesn't happen often. In fact, at Cannes 2014 it occurred exactly once during a passing moment in Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *Two Days, One Night*. Sandra (Marion Cotillard) has just gotten enough courage to set off on her journey and reclaim her job. After her first minor victory, she rides in the car with her husband, reaches for his hand, and smiles, a fitting music cue complimenting their

shared joy. Flashing by in a matter of seconds, the scene wonderfully encapsulates the quiet conviction and fragile spirit of a major film grappling with humanity in our corporatised, faceless age. It produces a feeling that has stayed with me ever since. Even writing about it gives me goosebumps once again. **GLENN HEATH JR**

One to One

It was bracingly clear that there was something unusual about the framing of Xavier Dolan's *Mommy* from its first instant. If aspect-ratio lingo wasn't in place to note the 1:1 ratio, there was a more intuitive way of putting it. Instead of a rectangle we were looking at a perfect square. A square might be a satisfying shape for holding a photograph but for rolling film conveying intimate drama it's uncomfortably cramped. The extra black space around the screen seemed bare. "Why aren't you using me, young auteur?!" it was (reportedly) heard murmuring. Some audience members walked out in solidarity with the frustrated black space. A compromise was struck among the remaining droves. We would overlook the peculiar construction on account of the compelling depiction of mother-son relations. Then the moment happened. The narrative theme of domestic claustrophobia, shared character dreams of broader horizons and Dolan's gutsy application of an unprecedented cinematic technique came together in a pinnacle that united audiences and characters in elated understanding. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

Neighbouring Sounds

One of cinema's great masters delivered a new film at this year's festival, though (wisely) chose not to grace us with his physical presence. Jean-Luc Godard's idea maelstrom

Goodbye to Language 3D is an intoxicating, ambient barrage of sounds and images that somehow coalesce into an intimate odyssey of love, evolution, historical sweep and the whole bit. Twenty minutes down the Croisette, another young upstart, David Robert Mitchell, delivered an angular, emotionally-charged and ingeniously devised horror movie called *It Follows*, in which a deathly curse is broken and passed on via illicit sexual liaisons. Little connects these films formally, but within the explicit context of the festival, they become short-haul cinematic brothers. At one very tense set-piece in *It Follows*, a lumbering audience member apparently decided that his time would be better spent elsewhere, and at the pivotal moment preceding a big jump-scare, he slams exit door in the backdrop, inciting nervous yelps from the remaining audience. The pinging digital siren call of the mobile phone is a constant fixture in Cannes screenings (alas!), but they managed to add to the symphony (both aural and thematic) in *Goodbye to Language 3D*, a film which examines a societal shift away from analogue and towards digital. It took a re-watch by another critic to confirm that those added tones were not actually part of the film's soundtrack. **DAVID JENKINS**

LW Lies' Cannes Top 10

1. Two Days, One Night
2. Jauja
3. Goodbye to Language 3D
4. Winter Sleep
5. Timbuktu
6. Mommy
7. Maps to the Stars
8. National Gallery
9. Clouds of Sils Maria
10. Catch Me Daddy



Two Days, One Night

Directed by **JEAN-PIERRE DARDENNE, LUC DARDENNE**
Starring **MARION COTILLARD, FABRIZIO RONGIONE, PILI GROYNÉ**
Released **22 AUGUST**

“O h those Dardenne brothers — they’re are always making the same movie over and over.”

It’s a tiresome refrain that is sadly echoed on arts pages and movie blogs worldwide. Belgian maestros Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne do indeed have a cinematic sweet tooth for a certain strain of politically trenchant and lightly-poetic realism, as well as a predilection for brusque suburban fairy tales about the domestic struggles of those existing on society’s hardscrabble fringes.

Setting aside the fact that it comes across as a sun-dappled sister film to their 1999 masterpiece, *Rosetta*, *Two Days, One Night* is also the brothers’ cunning riposte to any and all accusations of repetition. Down to the marrow of its subject matter, this is a film which examines the notion that, if one is fully-attuned to fine nuance, that genuine repetition is in fact beyond the capabilities of the human body and mind.

On paper, the concerns in this film translate as somewhat small fry, though the manner in which the Dardennes escort us through this quaint industrial proverb results in a work of near-incomprehensible moral and political complexity, and not to mention Earth-shattering import. In a similar vein to their wonderful previous, *The Kid with a Bike*, the brothers are now making films which appear to share their DNA with both Eric Rohmer and Walt Disney — miniature epics which are rooted in the realms of classical fantasy (is this their take on ‘Snow White’?). Tin-pot union bureaucracy has never felt so utterly heart-wrenching, and the film this most closely recalls is *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Carl Dreyer’s silent contemplation of a lone, weeping woman battling against the callous and corrupted bulldozer of “justice”.

Marion Cotillard’s sad-eyed and saintly mother-of-two, Sandra, is facing redundancy down at the local solar panel concern. Colleagues have voted to accept a €1000 bonus in lieu of keeping her on the payroll. Convinced there was foul play involved, Sandra — desperately forcing back a tumult of internal emotions, many of which have serious medical ramifications — is set a weekend quest when the boss allows for another vote two days hence. With the aid of her doting husband, she pluckily lobbies for her position, and the film offers a simple, episodic chronicle of her expedition to save her self-respect, her family and her sanity.

Cotillard is predictably immense in the lead, managing to bring subtle variation to the deliberately repetitious narrative which in turn exhibits the refinement of her tack as well as a process of realisation that her endeavour might just be entirely selfish — how can her own financial security be equally weighted against that of her colleagues? Her tearful eruptions of self-doubt are devastating, the first occurring in an almost unbearably upsetting opening sequence where she receives the bad news over the phone. Perhaps the most miraculous aspect of her performance is the fact that there’s no hint of movie-star slumming, that she’s getting her hands dirty and doing a “small movie” for the credo, that her character’s apparent simplicity should preclude a total and complete understanding of motivation.

The film asks, what is poverty in the 21st century? Do people have the same conceptions of success and hardship? Some may read *Two Days, One Night* as a celebration of individualism, while others might see something darker, perhaps a judgement on humanity as an essentially ungovernable morass of bodies who

each define happiness in different ways. The brothers also capitalise on the narrative opportunity to tenderly examine the social and ethnic diversity of Sandra’s colleagues (interestingly, it’s the minorities who tend to be more empathetic towards her plight) and, by mid-way through the film, even the neighbourhoods, streets and door-frames seem specifically chosen to provoke a pre-judgement. In the background, a symphony of alarms and beeps and warning signals and ringtones can be heard, a harbinger of social automation which we know can never truly be attained.

The genius of this film (to this writer, the brothers’ best) is the way that it constantly undercuts preconceptions. Just when you feel that didacticism is creeping in, that a side is being taken or a point is being pushed, there’s a twist and we’re right back to neutral. It’s difficult to articulate what it is that’s so great about the Dardennes’ cinema, but it perhaps has something to do with being in the thrilling company of filmmakers who fully comprehend the intricacies of their own text — a skill which is very much taken for granted. Their vigilance as filmmakers is awe-inspiring. This movie is a miracle. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *The Dardennes appear physically unable to make a bad movie.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Marion Cotillard is monumental.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *We may be jumping the gun, but Two Days, One Night is the brothers’ greatest film.*

5



*The
Amazing*



DARDENNE ★

≡ *Bros* ≡

The Dardenne Brothers

Two Days, One Night is an intimate epic about one woman's attempts to save her job. *LWLies* meets the legendary Belgian filmmakers behind it.

***LWLies*: Why did you decide to make a movie which is essentially the same scene played over and over?**

Luc Dardenne: Why not?! Other people have asked us if we were concerned about it, but we do think it was essential for the journey this woman takes. She needs to ask the same questions, and they too are asking the same questions. What are the others doing? What have they decided? Would I be in the majority or the minority? It's easier to be part of a majority — you feel less responsible. Sandra, in the very beginning, is a very quiet person who believed she was about to go back to her job. She learns that her colleagues voted for a bonus and against her re-integration, therefore she feels like an outcast. She doesn't dare to speak her mind, to say what she thinks. Her husband helps her in realising that she has to fight. Through this journey, she's able to exist again and believe in herself.

Why did you chose to make Sandra a woman?

Jean-Pierre Dardenne: The character of Sandra has been accompanying us for about 10 years. We managed to start writing the script only when we started to think of the husband character, Manu. In these 10 years, there was a brief moment when we thought about having a male protagonist, but I think the reasons why we opted for a woman are that, sadly, women are more fragile and weak within the environment of work. They are more inclined to be fired than men are. We also wanted to work with an actress, and when we started writing the script, we immediately thought of Marion Cotillard and nobody else. I think it was a subconscious thing, though. We wanted to work with her without really realising it.

LD: We can't reason on everything. To make

films, you must believe that you live with ghosts — things you can't comprehend or control. A French poet said, "An artist can never be the master of his own house, because he doesn't know what's happening in all the rooms."

Have you heard of workers being forced to make a decision like this?

LD: Not exactly the same situation, but similar. In our region, in Belgium, in small companies with less than 50 employees you would not have any trade union delegations or representatives, and therefore there's weakness. But we've also heard about opposite situations, where employees have agreed to reduce their salaries in order to help colleagues to retain their own jobs. We were impressed with a speech given by Barack Obama when he was vying for his second term. He thanked the workers of two companies who had accepted a decrease in salary in order to allow the company to overcome difficulties. There were also reality television programmes we saw in the US where the crew visits a small enterprise and the game is, who's going to be fired next? It's like saying, who's going to be sentenced to death next? The situation in our film is different, as it chronicles — little-by-little — Sandra's realisation of her right to exist.

Do you see yourself as political filmmakers? Is *Two Days, One Night* skeptical about democracy?


LD: No. In the film, the characters literally recreate a democratic situation. It is true that in real life democracy isn't able to totally carry out the dreams of equality and freedom, but I still think it's the only way to get there.

Was collaborating with a bona fide movie star different to working with the non-actors you've worked with before?

JPD: Being a filmmaker, it's natural to see what it would be like to work with a big star. Why not? It's a challenge. And the real challenge when working with someone like Marion is not just for us, but for her. The way we did this was trying to make her think that she was making her first film. That is to say, we wanted her to get rid of all those things she would normally carry with her — images, surroundings and the star lifestyle. She had to be ready to embody the role of Sandra. The reason why we chose her was based on the fact that we felt she was able to be Sandra — to give her life, feeling, intensity.

There's a focus on people eating food in the film. Is the film saying that people are actually more well-off than they think they are?

JPD: It's true. We usually just have a couple of fried eggs in our movies. We gave Manu the job of a cook in a restaurant, so there's that. But also because food is something that you share. We thought it was a good idea to open the film on a scene of a mother doing something for her children — making a tart. It's a sign of life. It's a moment of sharing. It's a film about solidarity, and this is just another part of it. There's much more eating in this film than previous films. A dirty mind might say that's because we're growing old and we want to eat well and we love food, but that we're not quite at the stage of adding sex to our films. Which we might do in the next one!

LD: Yes, more sex! 



God's Pocket

Directed by **JOHN SLATTERY**

Starring **PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN, CHRISTINA HENDRICKS, RICHARD JENKINS**

Released **8 AUGUST**

If Philip Seymour Hoffman was at his best when inhabiting characters who felt out of step with the world around them, it's both fitting and unfortunate that one of his last roles should evoke a sense of mounting frustration. In writer/director John Slattery's bricks-and-mortar drama, *God's Pocket*, Hoffman plays blue-collar schlub Mickey Scarpato, a heavy drinker, gambler and textbook loser residing in a fictional Philadelphia neighbourhood called God's Pocket. As we come to learn, Mickey is an outsider — a fact of which the born-and-bred locals are quick to remind him — but there's no question this is where he belongs.

A death in the family becomes the catalyst for the lowlifes and sadsacks of God's Pocket to show their true colours. Mickey included. When his jerkwad stepson Leon (Caleb Landry Jones) is killed at his construction site job, Mickey's wife, Jeanie (Christina Hendricks), implores him to investigate. There's nothing untoward in the police report based on Leon's co-workers' statements, but Jeanie is convinced her son's death was no accident. Mickey's got enough on his plate trying to scrape together enough cash to give the boy a proper funeral, but Jeanie is right to suspect foul play.

Her hunch — which cannot be explained beyond "women's intuition" — proves to be the foundation for a weak crime yarn that takes an ugly turn when a well-known columnist named Richard Shellburn (Richard Jenkins) arrives on the scene. As the most reliable hack on staff, it's Shellburn's job to clean up the mess after his paper falsely reports Leon's death. Despite being a self-professed man of the people, however, Shellburn is little more than a spent drunk who shows contempt for the cesspit dwelling deadbeats he has made his name writing about. He quickly takes advantage of a grief-stricken Jeanie.

She's not the only one being stiffed, though, as Mickey is soon having his trousers yanked down by the cartoonishly belligerent leeches he spends most of the film bantering and bartering with — namely John Turturro's affable crook and Eddie Marsan's schizoid funeral home director. These colourful bit players add some much-needed zest to this otherwise drab '70s-set potboiler. At times, however, it feels like Slattery doesn't quite know what to do with the considerable talent at his disposal.

It's hard to gauge what attracted the *Mad Men* star and occasional director to Pete Dexter's 1983 source novel, aside from

perhaps the obvious period familiarity. This is a film infatuated with its own grim realism, yet its attitude towards working-class life feels entirely unsympathetic. It positions itself early on — through Richard Jenkins' glib narration — as a black comedy-cum-social satire in the vein of Andrew Dominik's *Killing Them Softly*, but its gallows humour too often lands wide of the mark. A scene in which a popsicle corpse is thrown from a speeding meat truck with the turn-on-a-dime comic precision of an Adam Sandler movie is the most baffling case in point, but it's by no means an isolated incident. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *Could we see a posthumous tour de force from the great Philip Seymour Hoffman?*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Messy and one-dimensional.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *Like the fortunes of Hoffman's doomed protagonist, goes from bad to worse.*

2



Welcome to New York

Directed by **ABEL FERRARA**
 Starring **GÉRARD DEPARDIEU, JACQUELINE BISSET, DRENA DE NIRO**
 Released **8 AUGUST**

Abel Ferrara's *Welcome to New York* opens with a pre-credits interview which doubles as both an act of disclosure and discretion. In it, star Gérard Depardieu (as himself), acknowledges a common discrepancy in the art of acting: namely, that while he portrays an unsympathetic character — or in this case, via an unsubtle dramatisation of France's former financial ambassador Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a rather vile one — he doesn't condone or endorse his subject's actions. Coming from another director, this preamble could play as an attempt to preemptively diffuse allegations that the film may in fact be celebrating such behaviour. But from Ferrara, one of the most volatile and uncompromising of American auteurs, it further functions as a meta-cinematic comment on the performances which, at one point or another, we're all inclined to indulge.

Further suggesting a kind of universal depravity, Ferrara opts not to contextualise his film. Indeed, the entire narrative of *Welcome to New York* unfurls over the course of a few evenings, from the arrival of Devereaux, our Strauss-Kahn surrogate, in Manhattan to his subsequent house arrest following the attempted rape of a hotel maid.

For Ferrara (and by extension, Depardieu) there's nothing but the animalistic drive of this man — no explanations, no psychology, no remorse. The film is likewise singular in its depiction of Devereaux's pleasures and perversions. Beginning with what can discreetly be described as a 30-minute compendium of sexual liaisons, it is, in actuality, an orgy of indeterminate identities, a veritable overture of consumption and consummation — of limbs, liquids, liquors, and all things lascivious.

Following Devereaux's initial detention, a series of scenes detailing his incarceration unfold in near-real time. There's a pointedly procedural sense to these sequences; set inside a New York penitentiary, we watch as Devereaux is stripped naked and searched thoroughly, before being placed in a holding cell. In one of the film's few genuinely hilarious (rather than tensely humorous) moments, Ferrara's camera holds close on Devereaux as he paces back-and-forth in the cell, literally growling at his fellow inmates as they — and he in turn — attempt to intimidate.

The only break in the film's elemental focus transpires in a late montage as Devereaux reflects, in voiceover, upon the preceding events while overlooking the city's skyline.

"I don't have feelings. I don't feel guilty," Devereaux announces as he awaits trial, while his wife, Simone (Jacqueline Bisset) — privy to her husband's indiscretions but without imminent claim to recourse herself, lest she damage her own political plans — exasperatingly chastises his behaviour. Ferrara continues to excel in his depiction of such moral grey areas, and *Welcome to New York* proceeds to end on an appropriately ambiguous note — slyly appropriate, that is, as the film has long since handed out its verdict.

JORDAN CRONK

ANTICIPATION. *The uncompromising American auteur takes on the notorious Dominique Strauss-Kahn.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *A singularly hedonistic, tensely humorous experience.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Despite an elemental focus, Ferrara has fashioned a casually complex moral tale.*

4

Supermensch: The Legend of Shep Gordon

Directed by **BETH AALA, MIKE MYERS**
Starring **SHEP GORDON, SYLVESTER
STALLONE, MICHAEL DOUGLAS**
Released **18 JULY**



Get ready for some seriously good vibes, because if you make your own luck then Shep Gordon is the Henry Ford of karmic prosperity. Music promoter, band manager, film producer, Hollywood confidante... this is a world normally ring-fenced and patrolled by bastards, shysters and ballbreakers, yet Gordon is none of those things. He's a total babe. Director and old friend Mike Myers claims Shep to be "the nicest person I've ever met. Hands down." He's even pals with the Dalai Lama. And if you're waiting for the other shoe to drop, you've got a long wait coming.

Quitting his job as a parole officer, Gordon hit LA in the late '60s, where the first people he bumped into were Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, the latter musing that since Shep was Jewish, he should become an band manager. This isn't

racism because, hey, it's Jimi! It's fine. So it was that Gordon came to represent shock-rocker Alice Cooper, steering the singer through controversy and legal wrangles and into the big leagues. Stints as manager of such diverse acts as Blondie, Teddy Pendergrass, Pink Floyd (for a nine whole days) and the Gypsy Kings were to follow. Then there were the movies...

Myers delivers a warm and intimate portrait, and is clearly in love with his subject. Michael Douglas and Sly Stallone are equally gushing, and it's a very difficult film to dislike. But it's not perfect. There is some rudimentary framing and untidy editing on show and, though brief and restrained, the occasional re-enacted scene from Shep's past are all entirely unnecessary. It's also far too long, with Gordon's off-topic romantic dalliances and

health scares dragging the closing stretch down badly. **ADAM LEE DAVIES**

ANTICIPATION. *Shep Gordon? Never heard of him!*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Fair whips along and the stellar talking heads are on fine form, but perhaps outstays its welcome.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *You'll be looking him up as soon as it ends. The feeling this is all some huge elaborate hoax only adds spice!*

3

Who is Dayani Crystal?

Directed by **MARC SILVER**
Starring **GAEL GARCÍA BERNAL**
Released **25 JULY**



'Dayani' and 'Crystal' are the words tattooed across the chest of a male corpse found alone and ID-less in the Arizona desert in 2010. Filmmaker Marc Silver saw this corpse while working with Amnesty International and includes the footage he shot of the body, pixelating the face but nothing else. The inclusion does not feel sensationalist or tasteless. Rather, it is a quick path to illuminating Silver's motivation for sticking with the story and following the body through the official process of identification.

This path leads to a subculture of morbid jobs which exist to deal with the reality of migrants who perish anonymously on the punishing desert route to America. The people who hold such occupations radiate empathy for their cases. Missing persons investigators yearn to transform spreadsheets of John and Jane Does into known

names; forensics experts hydrate dead bodies to get plump fingerprints. Had this investigation been played straight, like a 'who is he?' equivalent of a 'whodunnit', it could have been a fascinating dance through lesser-seen modes of work, but Silver is so fired up by the circumstances of Dayani's death that he adds another confusing layer.

Gael García Bernal retraces the final journey taken by 'Dayani Crystal'. This timeline involves Bernal embodying the concerns of a man who left his family out of economic fear, as well as interviews with the family. All information is potent, and yet Silver has put the kibosh on his own mystery story. A further unstaggered influx of data is provided by the death-industry workers who spew forth political and immigration stats — again, all independently interesting but as a

cumulative mass feel unfortunately like an uncured information dump.

Yet the failure of certain ambitious storytelling methods does not equate to the failure of this film. With its pervasive air of sorrow it stands as a heartfelt eulogy. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Who, indeed?*

2

ENJOYMENT. *It's a sad, sad situation and Silver gets it heard.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Leaves a legacy of tenacious empathy for dead migrant workers.*

4

Hector and the Search for Happiness

Directed by **PETER CHELSOM**
 Starring **ROSAMUND PIKE, SIMON PEGG, TONI COLLETTE**
 Released **15 AUGUST**



Simon Pegg's search for happiness includes a desire to do a Jim Carrey, or more specifically, to mix up the endearing comic skills that shone in joyfully weird TV series, *Spaced*, and then thrived on the big screen in *Shaun of the Dead* and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the 'Cornetto Trilogy'. With a serious blockbuster (*Star Trek Into Darkness*) under his belt, now is the time for Pegg to prove himself as a dramatic actor.

Hector and the Search for Happiness is British director Peter Chelsom's adaptation of a novel by French psychiatrist François Lelord. It's about a psychiatrist (Pegg) who realises he can't help his patients because happiness is an emotional state he neither understands nor embodies. He promptly bids adieu to his

unrealistically tolerant and beautiful girlfriend Clara (Rosamund Pike) to travel the world hoping that adventure and new cultural experiences will lead him to emotional wisdom.

It plays initially like *Eat, Pray, Love*, but the film fails to sustain a spiritual tone thanks to Pegg's insincerity. Complex and anguished people open up to Hector, yet in each of these intimate encounters, Pegg looks like he's thinking, 'Yikes!'. He talks to a bleeding African boy with the vacant smile of a touring monarch. The levels of discordance between the committed performances of the supporting cast and Pegg's self-conscious, schoolboy superficiality builds until the only way the film could make sense would be to reveal Hector as a target in *The Game*.

While this doesn't happen narratively, the

end result is the same. Talented actors (Stellan Skarsgård, Jean Reno, Christopher Plummer) lend their skills in the name of one man's quest. Here's hoping that Pegg has guzzled max happiness while making the film, because there's not much on offer for those of us watching.
SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

ANTICIPATION. *Is this Simon Pegg's The Truman Show?*

3

ENJOYMENT. *No.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *The search continues...*

2

The Keeper of Lost Causes

Directed by **MIKKEL NØRGAARD**
 Starring **NIKOLAJ LIE KAAS, FARES FARES, SONJA RICHTER**
 Released **29 AUGUST**



Nikolaj Lie Kaas, a Danish actor that British viewers may be familiar with as one of the "spazzers" in Lars Von Trier's *The Idiots*, plays Carl Mørck, the eponymous 'Keeper of Lost Causes' who is a cantankerous, friendless, grizzled detective dead set on solving the unsolvable. After witnessing his parter getting whacked in the opening scene, Carl is reassigned to a dusty basement to file away the cases that got away. Yet his flinty temperament leads him to pick up the one off the top of the pile and decide that, by hook or by crook, he's going to bust it wide open again and make his colleagues look like lacklustre idiots.

It's very robust and very unexceptional thriller, playing like a TV-movie escapee with very little — both in style and narrative — to justify this cinema sortie. All the policier/Scandi

noir clichés are dutifully rolled out as Carl and his chipper Muslim partner Assad (Fares Fares) head out in search of a young, female academic whose mysterious disappearance on a car ferry was incorrectly chalked-up a suicide. As the pair go deeper and deeper, expending insane amounts of time and effort to get their man, their superior loses his rag and says, "you're off the case!" But the small matter of a full revocation of badge and gun isn't enough to stop them in their tireless tracks.

Carl never smiles. His powers of deduction are presented as superhuman, meaning that the way he solves the crime often exceeds the bounds of the credible. Though director Mikkel Nørgaard sets up a decent ticking-clock finale, it does come on the back of some staggering leaps of narrative faith. There is, however, a chilling

scenario involving our damsel in distress being placed into a pressure tank which, for every year of her enforced detainment, drops a few more atmospheres until, we assume, she explodes.
DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. *Another Scandi noir gets a cinema run-out.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Ticks along nicely without doing or saying anything out of the ordinary. Kaas makes for a very decent lead, though.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *It's a TV movie. Sorry, but it is.*

2



Charulata (1964)

Directed by SATYAJIT RAY

Starring SOUMITRA CHATTERJEE, MADHABI MUKHERJEE, SHAILEN MUKHERJEE

Released 22 AUGUST

At the beginning of Satyajit Ray's 1964 film *Charulata*, the character of Charu (played by Madhabi Mukherjee) is alone and bored. We are invited to share in her boredom. For this opening 10 minutes, we watch as she listlessly wanders from room to room, flicks disinterestedly through books and watches the world go by through shuttered windows. From the way the camera glides down corridors, darts around corners and anxiously follows Charu's gaze, Ray's cinematographer Subrata Mitra appears to be as restless in these confined surroundings as the film's protagonist.

This is an understated opening sequence for a film that drew criticism upon its release for being too slow. Howard Thompson's *New York Times* review complained that *Charulata* "moves like a majestic snail," but the methodical rhythm that Ray imposes on his film is actually a virtue. It allows us time and space to empathise with Charu's situation; neglected by her husband and left to spend her days idle in an empty house, with the bars on the windows reinforcing the sense of her home as a prison. When her husband — an Empire-obsessed newspaper publisher — finally returns home, Charu watches him through the wrong end of her opera glasses, emphasising the emotional distance between them.

In the previous year's *Mahanagar*, Ray had told the story of a woman's developing sense of independence and self-worth after being unexpectedly thrust into the workforce. *Charulata* explores similar territory, although on this occasion Mukherjee's character undergoes an artistic blossoming, with Charu being encouraged by her brother-in-law Amal (Soumitra Chatterjee) to express her thoughts and feelings through writing. The romance that subsequently develops between these two characters is largely unspoken and very chaste — they only share a few brief embraces — but the chemistry between the two actors is strikingly potent, and Ray was a master of creating moments of great resonance from a series of swift gestures and glances.

Ray relies heavily on his mesmerising star, of course. He once described Mukherjee as "the archetypal Ray woman," and in each of the three films they worked together on (including the smaller but no less impressive *The Coward* from 1965), she brings forth the complex inner life of women who are too often underestimated by the men around her. Under Ray's direction, she emerged as an actress who radiates warmth, wit and intelligence, and she never came close to

hitting such heights again after their relationship had ended.

Charulata was a very important project for Ray, who took the unusual step of refusing to work to producers' deadlines as he strove to perfect his adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's novella. The result is a film that acts as a clear refinement and summation of his style and preoccupations, and a work that stands as a singular achievement even in an oeuvre as diverse and accomplished as Ray's. Whenever he was asked to name his own favourite film from his body of work, Ray would usually cite *Charulata*, but while many have described the film as a masterpiece, the director was slightly more circumspect in his view. "It's the one with the fewest flaws" was his unassuming verdict. PHIL CONCANNON

ANTICIPATION. *Satyajit Ray is one of cinema's greatest artists.* **5**

ENJOYMENT. *Ravishing, complex, moving — and that ending.* **5**

IN RETROSPECT. *Truly timeless.* **5**



DAILY EXPRESS



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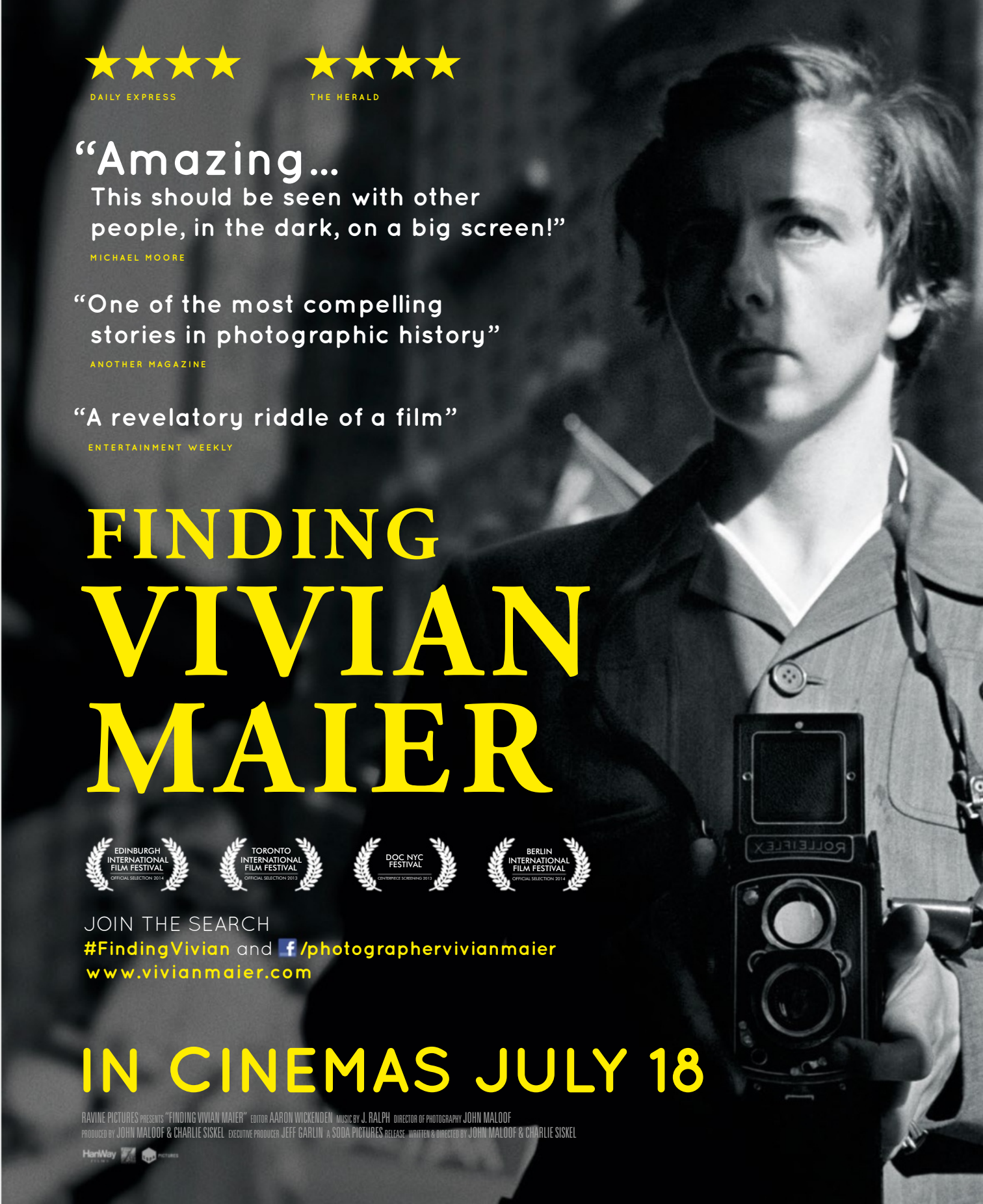
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God Help the Girl

Directed by **STUART MURDOCH**

Starring **EMILY BROWNING, OLLY ALEXANDER, HANNAH MURRAY**

Released **AUGUST TBC**

Like an artisan breadcrumb trail, *God Help the Girl* is made of disconnected parts yet ones so tangy and abstractly engaging that it is easy to be tickled right until the end. This Glasgow-set musical drama, written and directed by Stuart Murdoch of indie pop darlings, Belle and Sebastian, captures a summer in the life of three aspiring musicians: affable free-spirit, Cassie (Hannah Murray); lovelorn streak of indie kid passion, James (Olly Alexander), and Eve (Emily Browning).

We meet Eve in hospital where she's being treated for anorexia. This isn't a film about eating disorders or mental illness, it is one about using music and creation as a means to moving beyond distress. Nonetheless, Murdoch understands that to give meaning to Eve's desires we must see from where she came (and doesn't want to return). The hospital is dingy. The first time we see Eve, she's in total darkness. Browning hesitates before responding to her nurse confidante, choosing words of measured politeness. In her pauses, loaded words not chosen are implied and the hospital's lighting system becomes an external barometer of her current mood.

This bleakness could not be further removed from the increasingly stylised production palette and preppy costumes that take hold after Eve breaks free and starts sauntering round town in a beret with her photogenic new pals. It's an astonishing tonal leap that only works because the film is propped up by songs and playful set-pieces rather than anything more naturalistic. It has the narrative beats of a compendium of twee music videos with their built-in accelerated timelines and magical, high-dosage transcendence from the everyday.

Songs are all lifted from the 2009 concept album 'God Help The Girl', a collaboration between Murdoch and vocalist Catherine Ireton, who was sourced through an internet campaign. The strikingly sweet melodies are served justly by Browning in her clear, supple tones. Lyrics rather than dialogue bear out her character's motivations. Opening song 'Act of the Apostle' contains the instructive line: "If you're going to grow up some time / you have to do it on your own."

With the lion's share of the songs, the depth they confer and a mesmerising embodiment of character thanks to Browning, Eve is the stand-

alone star, a narrative fact that helps to negate the comparatively lightweight characters of James and Cassie. Alexander and Murray give game performances but can't counter the dramatic reality that they are (musically-talented) props for a film that, after all, is not called *God Help the Trio*.

It feels like Murdoch, who has a clear gift for words, casting and individual scenes, perhaps ran out of inspiration when it came to producing a satisfying feature-length narrative and building sustained relationship tensions between his characters, leaving us to feast in the rich spots and starve in their absence.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

ANTICIPATION. *Can a great musician make a great film?*

2

ENJOYMENT. *In parts.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *A complex blend of whimsy and depth makes this a promising debut from Mr Murdoch.*

4

Stuart Murdoch

LWLies meets the Belle and Sebastian frontman to pick apart his first movie: a Glasgow-set musical called *God Help the Girl*.

The lead singer of Scottish indie-pop waifs, Belle and Sebastian, made a concept album and then followed it up with a spin-off movie. *God Help the Girl* is his charming debut feature, a spry urban musical powered by grubby romantics, growing pains and vintage threads.

LWLies: Was it always your intention to start your first feature film with the voice of Northern broadcaster Stuart Maconie?

Murdoch: No, it never was. I've been working on this for quite some time, as you can imagine. The only thing I was certain of in terms of how the movie starts is that Eve [Emily Browning, the film's lead character] would escape from a window, turn to camera and then start singing. That was the essential thing. Originally, the title song was going to play out over the opening, but then we ended putting the titles over Eve's first song, Act of the Apostles. So no, Maconie wasn't planned.

The discussion on the radio in that opening segment is of great artists dying young.

It was slightly serendipitous. We had Maconie and Mark Radcliffe for about an hour, and luckily they can talk for Britain. I would throw a subject at them — like, Glasgow indie pop — and immediately they were talking about Orange Juice and The Pastels. So I got them talking about dead pop stars, and thought it would be a good opening gambit as it places a question mark over the rest of the film. When you see a film, everything you see and hear — especially in the opening 10 or so minutes — is extremely significant.

It's satisfying when prompts at the beginning of a movie don't turn out the way you expect them to.

They were the greatest value thing we got out of

the film. We spoke to them for an hour, as I said, and we pretty much used everything. I can't wait to speak to them, as I don't think they even know they're in the film.

Why did you choose to have a female lead in this film as opposed to a male?

I didn't choose. I know that sounds pretentious, but the first thing that happened with the film was the music came along and I just wrote down what I heard. And it was a woman singing the title song. It's like switching on a radio. That was the first time I ever got a song in my head and it wasn't by me. It was from somewhere else. And I loved that.

So this was the first time you were hearing songs in the third rather than first person?

Yep, absolutely. Your mind gets trained. It's a real effort to write songs when you're just starting off, but when you start to work with a palette, i.e. your band, I hear the songs like they're finished.

I know what the band will do with them. This was the first time I heard them with another voice.

Was this a similar process with making the film? Were you seeing images in your mind?

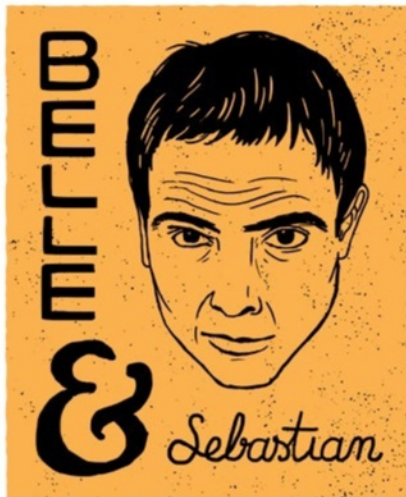
Well I certainly tried. But I'm way less good at that. I'm not a director in that sense. Maybe if I keep going I'll get better. There are important elements, though, like Eve dropping down from the window, and when she finally escapes wearing her football uniform and has one foot in the gutter — they were always a key images. These images guide you. Your job is to join them up.

The film reminded us of Jacques Demy. Were there any movies that specifically inspired you here?

Yes, many. When the guys came up to Glasgow I bought them all a little care package of films. I asked them all, did you get my package? And they were all like, oh, yeah, someone left us a bunch of DVDs. Did you not think to look who they were from?! Yeah, we tried to watch one. We tried to watch *Gregory's Girl*. It was okay... There's my life in this package! *Withnail & I* and *Billy Liar* and *Grease* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Pretty in Pink* — I was trying to give them a really good night in!

Do you think people might read this film as your way of saying you're finished with Belle and Sebastian?

Ha, no. That never occurred to me for a second. I'm certainly not that person and that wasn't my notion at all. People have passed through my life in the same way Eve has, so in that sense I feel more like the James character who's left behind. It's a safer and more truthful way to be. She's gone, we're here, and what the fuck do we do now? That's how I wanted to leave things



Wakolda

Directed by **LUCÍA PUENZO**

Starring **ÁLEX BRENDEMÜHL,**
DIEGO PERETTI, FLORENCIA BADO

Released **8 AUGUST**



There are shades of Bryan Singer's *Apt Pupil* in Lucía Puenzo's fact-based drama, adapted from her own historical book about the friendship between a young girl and a mysterious German doctor. It's Patagonia, 1960, when a neatly mustacio'd figure (Álex Brendemühl) takes up with a nice Argentine family as they make a long drive to an old family hotel where they intend to live. We know something creepy is afoot because of the droning score, ominous storm and general bad vibes of said neatly mustacio'd figure literally following the family down a road.

The figure is a doctor who becomes medically fascinated with Lilith (Florencia Bado), one of the family's three children who is somewhat small, lonely and fanciful. The looks that pass between the two are filled with mutual interest, but

while she imparts the emotions of a blossoming first crush, his concerns are clinical to the point of inhumanity.

Puenzo is at her best when wringing out the menace of this dramatic irony. She is careful not to over-signpost the historical significance of a man who — with a crisp enigmatic mode of charisma delivered expertly by Brendemühl — seduces the family into letting him live with them. Where the film loses its grip is in the familial subplots. Enzo (Diego Peretti) the father is a doll-maker who wants to make all his toys perfectly identical. It's a parallel that sounds hammy and is played out with an extra fatty slab of the stuff. The deviation into flabby and unnecessary metaphor is Puenzo levelling an insult at her own talents for excavating a story. She has found and then

watered down events with the power to work as a great chiller. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *True history stories are among our favourite ways to learn.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Taut themes and fascinating facts are occasionally stymied by heavy-handed metaphors.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Puenzo's ambitions have gotten in the way of her darkly interesting tale.*

3

Dinosaur 13

Directed by **TODD DOUGLAS MILLER**

Released **15 AUGUST**



“Look up, you’re looking at the past. Look down, you’re looking at the past.” So says one of the many paleontologists featured in Todd Douglas Miller’s documentary *Dinosaur 13*, a film that takes pains to prove that life on Earth is surrounded by history on all sides. The present is nothing more than an all out war to decide who gets to tell that history.

The movies have cemented the Tyrannosaurus Rex as the most famous star of the Jurassic era, but prior to 1990, only twelve specimens had ever been recovered, and none of those skeletons had even been even half intact. That all changed in August of that year, when Peter Larson and his team of scientists from the Black Hills Institute wandered into the Badlands of South Dakota and discovered a fossil so well preserved it could have worked for Spielberg. They called it “Sue”, the

bones named after the woman who found them. Larson’s crew paid the alleged landowner \$5,000 for their find, took their adopted baby home, and immediately went to work giving it the love it never had. On a blue May morning less than two years later, the FBI rolled up to Black Hills and seized Sue without warning or cause, inciting a custody battle 65 million years in the making.

Miller introduces a number of fascinating characters, but the film refuses to dig any deeper than it has to, streamlining this demonstrably far-reaching drama into a banal legal thriller. Despite unearthing a rich vein of pathos from the profound scientific discovery at its centre, Miller’s film consistently favours courtroom semantics over the personalities that drive the story. Conventionally told through a series of excitable talking heads, vital archival

footage and needless recreations, *Dinosaur 13* is too preoccupied with preserving the past to ever bring it back to life. **DAVID EHRLICH**

ANTICIPATION. *Generated moderate, if hardly deafening buzz from Sundance. A film to get the Ross Gellers of this world excited.*

2

ENJOYMENT. *The potential for an expansive human drama is dashed in favour of drab legal thriller.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *A great story, fascinating subject matter, a missed opportunity.*

2



Jealousy

Directed by PHILIPPE GARREL

Starring LOUIS GARREL, ANNA MOUGLALIS, REBECCA CONVENANT

Released 18 JULY

Eternally situated between the intimate and the enraptured, the post-*nouvelle* stylings of director Philippe Garrel revel in moments of swooning sentiment and afflicted *amour fou*. Essentially an ongoing reflection on a life shaped by romantic realisation and the prospectus of its resultant passions, the French filmmaker's methodology has, for over a half-century now, proven a beneficial outlet for interests both artistic and anatomical. *Jealousy*, Garrel's latest cinematic interlude, segues seamlessly into a career continuum defined by such sincere severity (and severe sincerity), yet lands gracefully in a state of welcome repose.

A return to a black-and-white, autumnal utopia after the flush sensuality of 2011's *A Burning Hot Summer*, *Jealousy* likewise pulls back from Garrel's occasional lapses into melodrama toward a level of tranquil melancholy. Starring his son and recent muse Louis Garrel as a single father (named Louis) trapped between lingering feelings for the mother of his child, Clothilde (Rebecca Convention), and his current partner Claudia (Anna Mouglalis), the film navigates the coordinates of this triangle — and other covert variables — with a fluid poise typical of its director. Information and exposition is

continually elided, just as individual scenes forgo demarcation, creating internal ellipses which gather an effortless rhythm from moment to moment. Indeed, *Jealousy* is built on such fleeting instances; romance is born in a glance and relinquished with an edit, as Garrel's expert imagining of the temporal boundaries linking each of these relationships fosters a kind of time-lapse visual diary of intertwined fates.

Despite the three adults whose indiscretions fuel the tension that lies just beneath the film's placid surface, *Jealousy's* narrative perspective is unmistakably positioned from that of a child. In the film's opening sequence we literally see, in a point-of-view shot captured from a keyhole, through the eyes of Louis and Clothilde's eight-year-old daughter Charlotte (Olga Milshtein), who is eavesdropping on her parents arguing in the next room. It's the only first-person manifestation of Charlotte's viewpoint, yet the film remains acutely childlike in its depiction of conflicted psychology and the minute details and decisions which accrue irreconcilable power over the weeks, months, and years of a relationship.

The corresponding gentleness in the film's formal demeanour and its deceptively modest framework (clocking in at a slim 77 minutes),

along with the reflexive nature of its conception — Garrel's late father, Maurice, left his wife at a similar juncture in his son's life, while Louis reflects on the absence of his deceased father on multiple occasions throughout the film — may conveniently mark *Jealousy* as a quintessential late-period work. But then Garrel has always approached his highly personal subject matter from discrete angles: whether against backdrops great (2005's *Regular Lovers*) or small (1979's *L'enfant Secret*), the director's career-long attention to life's interstitial moments and the gradations in emotion which offset such periods of serenity, has ably assisted over that time in fortifying his artistic autonomy. **JORDAN CRONK**

ANTICIPATION. *One of the French romantic's most acclaimed festival premieres in years.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *A deceptively modest, quietly profound infidelity drama.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *One of Garrel's richest films to date.*

4



I Am Divine

Directed by **JEFFREY SCHWARZ**
 Starring **DIVINE, JOHN WATERS, MINK STOLE**
 Released **18 JULY**

The tale of debauched drag performer Divine's route from obscurity to underground mega-stardom by no means follows a traditional *A Star is Born* trajectory. Propelled to notoriety by eating dog faeces in a landmark moment of cinema taboo-busting, 'the face that repulsed a thousand ships' seems a more fitting epitaph for John Waters' outrageous muse.

Famed for frequently dragging the aesthetics of cinema into the gutter, this perverse duo of pop culture mutineers were on the cusp of mainstream success at the time of Divine's first critically acclaimed performance in *Hairspray* and his near simultaneous, untimely death three weeks later. *I Am Divine*, directed by Jeffrey Schwarz, acts as a sagacious cinematic eulogy to the man behind the make up, from his struggles as a sexually confused teenage misfit to his status as drag innovator and legendary cult superstar with an inconspicuously far-reaching legacy.

The film tells the little known story of the enigmatic off-screen Divine (aka Harris Glenn Milstead) who, surprisingly, bears little resemblance to the taste terrorist

and midnight movie hellfiend. Schwarz highlights the interesting juxtaposition between person and persona, exposing the kind, gentle outsider Milstead behind this foul mouthed in-your-face alter ego. Milstead's secret quest to be taken seriously as an actor and break away from the beloved persona bestowed upon him by Waters comes as a tragic revelation given the timing of his passing.

I Am Divine revisits the work of Waters and is as much a film about bad taste cinema as a biographical celebration, interspersing clips from his grindhouse cult catalogue with anecdotal surprises from Waters himself and his troupe of fellow transgressors, the Dreamlanders. Schwarz scratches at the surface of the unusual dynamic between Waters' and Divine's relationship which, given the context of such stomach churning set-pieces (rape by lobster, coprophagia, incest, boxed turds) could quite easily be interpreted as sado-masochistic.

However, a trusting, creative relationship is clearly evidenced here in affecting mutual

exchanges and rare behind the scenes footage, providing one of the film's most touching dimensions. These insights, alongside Milstead's troubled relationship with his estranged parents, are stirring to say the least.

It's now 25 years since Divine's death and almost a decade since John Waters' last lurid offering, *A Dirty Shame*. *I Am Divine* will have fans of both almost certainly feeling nostalgic for screen filth, while affording them a long-awaited and seedy stroll down the dirt-flecked alleyways behind Memory Lane. **REBECCA ELLIS**

ANTICIPATION. "Oh my God Almighty! Someone has sent me a bowel movement!" (Catchphrase c/o Divine)

4

ENJOYMENT. *This is divine.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. "You stand convicted of ass-holism." (Our new catchphrase c/o Divine)

4



Mystery Road

Directed by IVAN SEN

Starring AARON PEDERSEN, HUGO WEAVING, RYAN KWANTEN

Released 29 AUGUST

There's a place called Slaughter Hill, it's off Mystery Road," says Indigenous Police Inspector Jay Swan (Aaron Pedersen) into the phone, setting up the fateful rendez-vous that will bring Ivan Sen's feature to its tense climax. It is also roughly where the narrative began, with a truck driver stopping on Mystery Road at Massacre Creek, and discovering there an Aboriginal girl with her throat slit.

Mystery, Slaughter, Massacre — these place names serve as convenient genre markers in a film that is part murder mystery, part western, and also features a motel called "From Dusk Till Dawn", a Jason Voorhees-style hockey mask, and even a reference to a genetically engineered 'superdog'. Yet for all their genre associations, these names are also signposts mapping out a real history of colonial outrages against the native populace, still encoded in the landscape like an open wound. And in these places, haunted by a horrific past, history appears to be repeating itself, as lines are once more drawn between a town's already divided white and black communities, and natives are being exploited, abused and murdered all over again,

with crystal meth replacing alcohol as the new social poison.

Returned after several years of exile in the Big Smoke, Jay is assigned the case of the young woman's murder, and finds himself caught between two worlds. On the one hand he is estranged from his ex-wife (Tasma Walton) and daughter and living alone on the other side of town from where his native community resides, while on the other he is distrustful of his white masters and colleagues — like slippery vice cop Johnno (Hugo Weaving). As Jay's enquiries lead to racist ranchers, underage prostitutes and drug conspiracies, the earnest detective finds himself once again taking up his father's old Winchester rifle — and significantly using for target practice the beer bottles that were his late father's ruin. Jay's is an uneasy legacy to shoulder, making him, as one character puts it, "like one of 'em black trackers who turns on his own type" — but in the end, however divided his loyalties, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.

The final shootout atop Slaughter Hill is an unconventionally long-range affair, conducted at a distance through hunting rifle scopes. This does not just show off to good effect the wide

open spaces of Australia's dusty outback, but also gives visual form to the immense, perhaps unbridgeable divide that exists between the rock and the hard place of Australia's ongoing culture wars. Like John Hillcoat's *The Proposition* and especially Patrick Hughes' *Red Hill*, this modern Aussie oater uses the nation's sparse topography as the spectacular staging ground for a conflict between sinister pioneers and put-upon locals. Yet while it may look like a genre film, and feel like a genre film, *Mystery Road* is also entirely of a piece with Sen's earlier *Beneath Clouds* and *Toomelah* in its thematic preoccupation with indigenous issues, colonial injustice and uprooted identity.

ANTON BITEL

ANTICIPATION. *Loved Beneath Clouds and Toomelah.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Indigenous oater.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Spectacular scenery, genre signposts, and a half-buried history of colonial abuse.*

4



Obvious Child

Directed by **GILLIAN ROBESPIERRE**
 Starring **JENNY SLATE, JAKE LACY, GABY HOFFMANN**
 Released **29 AUGUST**

A few years back, two of the biggest and most talked-about comedy movies were *Knocked Up* and *Juno*. Both had the same essential set-up: a young woman gets unexpectedly pregnant, causing hilarity and romance to ensue. But many were puzzled at best (and shocked at worst) that, in a 21st century film, the possibility of a leading character terminating a pregnancy was essentially glossed over. Judd Apatow, director of *Knocked Up*, defended the decision, saying that the film would be '15 minutes long' if his lead did have an abortion. But along comes *Obvious Child*, which seems to set out to lock horns with both that statement, and the two earlier films.

One of the buzzier premieres of this year's Sundance Film Festival, first-time feature director Gillian Robespierre's film, an expansion of her 2009 short of the same name, is not dissimilar in its narrative make-up to *Juno* and *Knocked Up*. Stand-up comedian Donna (Jenny Slate) loses her job and her boyfriend in a matter of days and, drowning her sorrows, falls into bed with handsome stranger Max (Jake Lacy). A few weeks pass, and Donna realises that she might not have been as careful

as she thought, because it turns out that she's very pregnant.

The paths diverge from there, though. Unlike her predecessors in this sub-genre, Slate's character immediately decides that she doesn't want a child and arranges an abortion, though she'll have to wait a few weeks for it. It's a refreshing move, reflecting a decision that many women Donna's age would probably take. And the film makes no bones about the other women in her life, including her best friend, played by the suddenly omnipresent Gaby Hoffmann, and her mother, played by Polly Draper, having had similar experiences.

Not that the decision is taken lightly or treated with glib abandon: it's unsentimental about the prospect, but there is real dramatic weight behind it too, much of it thanks to a performance of impressive range and intensity by Slate, an unfamiliar name over here (she's best known for a year-long run on *Saturday Night Live*), but one that's unlikely to remain that way for long.

Beyond its big, button-pushing talking point, the film isn't especially groundbreaking: it's a Brooklyn-by-way-of-Park-City Apatowian romantic comedy. But it's a particularly

well-executed one, sharply scripted, compassionately played and with a drawn-from-life truthfulness at its core. Scenes unfold organically and without much in the way of contrivance, and the chemistry between Slate and Lacy (familiar from the US *The Office*, and a winning and welcome presence here) is palpable.

Some may dismiss the film as 'just' a rom-com, but given the dire state of the genre, it's a great pleasure to see one that's as funny, deep and well-formed as this one. But it's the willingness to take on one of mainstream cinema's last taboos that makes the film feel not just hugely enjoyable, but also important to boot. **OLIVER LYTTTELTON**

ANTICIPATION. *Lots of Sundance buzz, but we've been burned before.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *One of the fresher and funnier recent rom-coms.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Smart, progressive and sensitive.*

4

Gillian Robespierre

LWLies talks Terrence Malick fart soundboards with the writer/director of *Obvious Child*.

It's true that *Obvious Child* is yet another micro-budget indie about privileged white hipsters in Brooklyn, but writer/director Gillian Robespierre's first feature might also be the most quietly groundbreaking film to come out of Sundance this year. The story of Donna Stern (former *SNL* star Jenny Slate), a young comedian with a dirty mouth and an unwanted pregnancy, *Obvious Child* isn't just one of the few films to openly embrace a woman's right to choose, it's also one of the first to dare to laugh while doing so. Developed from a short that Robespierre and Slate made together in 2009, *Obvious Child* is poised to be the most unexpected breakout movie of the summer. *LWLies* met up with Robespierre in Manhattan to chat about giving birth to a new kind of romantic comedy.

LWLies: *Obvious Child* does a tremendous job of normalising the idea of abortion — was the idea to use romantic comedy tropes as a trojan horse to unburden the topic from taboo?

Robespierre: Well those are the movies that I like. I love rom-coms, I love movies that are entertaining and funny and have a little bit of a love story. But I also wanted to tell this story that wasn't being told properly, as most movies about unplanned pregnancies always end in childbirth. Also, the leading ladies in romantic comedies felt really stale and boring, these yellow-haired, Prada-wearing, down on their luck girls are all very one-sided.

So you didn't reach out to Katherine Heigl for the lead role in this film?

We did not. She seems lovely... We wanted Jenny Slate. We wrote the feature for her, and writing for her is something that I thoroughly enjoy. There's a freedom in knowing that this person who is so smart and so funny is going to take these words and make them even better. We wanted to flip the

choice on its ass, and also the genre on its ass. We wanted to write a woman who comes home from work and puts sweatpants on and takes her bra off. When she drinks wine for six hours straight her teeth are going to be stained, and when she wakes up she's going to have bad breath and be covered in tears and crust.

Do you feel like this is a New York movie as much because of the locations as the prevailing attitudes it features about abortion?

There are protestors at clinics, and we're very lucky that New York doesn't really have that. I know that it's really scary out there, and that reproductive rights are under attack. But I had seen that story before, and I just wanted to tell a story where you go into a clinic, and it's very warm — there are almost too many pastels, like pink has been puked up everywhere — and the nurses and practitioners are very proud people who care about you, not horrible people tapping their nails on the table or whatever.



The surest sign of true evil.

Exactly.

You raised funding for the film through Kickstarter, in part because you needed money to make sure that every fart in the film acquired its own feeling and emotion.

Our secret weapon is Casey Brooks, our editor. He gave us a fart noise for Jake Lacy right out of the gate and we went with it.

You were like, "This is it. This is the fart."

Exactly. We didn't want something too juicy, because that meant he probably shat his pants. It needed to be muffled in just the right way.

How many fart sound files does an average editor have at their disposal?

Well, when they make a movie with me...

They have more than when they work with Terrence Malick.

You just say Terrence Malick's name and an angel farts. An angel farts in a wheat field.

The stand-up material in the movie is so expressive of who Donna is — was all of that written for the movie, or were you repurposing some of Jenny's material?

We always wanted Donna to have a very confessional type of storytelling stand-up, and Jenny is like that with her stand-up. She'll talk about her parents, growing up, and her life... and farts and vaginas are part of that. But Donna is a lot dirtier, and way more confessional, so we sort of combined her with Jenny. We took what was on the page and suffused it with Jenny's brilliant mind and that's where Donna came to life.



Begin Again

Directed by **JOHN CARNEY**

Starring **KEIRA KNIGHTLEY, MARK RUFFALO, HAILEE STEINFELD**

Released **11 JULY**

We may be confronted here with the sentimental surface of a Richard Curtis rom-com, but behind the attractive leads and uplifting plotline of *Begin Again* is a sophisticated understanding of relationships hitting a crossroads.

Cruel critics have highlighted the seeming similarities between this film — previously titled *Can a Song Save Your Life?* — and director John Carney's low-budget break-out hit, *Once*. While both occupy that less-often-filled niche of clever, intuitive musical comedy, *Once* was concerned with a love that dare not sing its name. The central relationship in *Begin Again* — despite the inevitable 'will they/won't they' undertone — is a platonic depiction of a man and a woman concerned with helping each other with lonely personal questions. Will singer Greta (Keira Knightley) go back to her cheating rock-star ex? Will record producer Dan (Mark Ruffalo) reunite with his former comforter (bourbon, and lots of it)?

The pair meet in a New York bar where recently-single Greta has been forced by her perma-perky English mate (James Corden) to sing about being alone. The recently fired Dan, who has hit the bar to sink booze, goes

into raptures, supplementing her song in his mind's eye with background instrumentation. Carney shoots Dan's musical vision in the style of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Drumsticks take to the air and soon there's a whole invisible band at play. The sequence is an ingeniously imaginative way of depicting a turning point for a character who, at that precise moment, is unemployed, insolvent, drunk and separated from the mother of his teenage daughter. From then on Dan has a purpose: to record Greta's first album.

The outdoor recording sessions show a man with purpose, but Dan's arc is cluttered with details that don't fit. The brilliant Catherine Keener and emerging starlet Hailee Steinfeld play his ex-wife and daughter. Both do stalwart jobs of beaming out plausibility, but their essential function is transparently to reflect how Dan is faring on the Bad Dad/Cool Dad scale.

It's left to Knightley to mix up some on-screen chemistry with Dan and have a backstory that means something. She pulls off both tasks, capturing, in her inimitably spirited way, the barbed vulnerability of a woman caught between the familiarity of a fucked-up old relationship and a cleaner but unpredictable

future. Carney uses Greta's sudden occupation upgrade to recording artist to symbolise the individual opportunities afforded by moving on, while her ex, Dave Kohl, operates as a lame but still seductive option.

The dynamic between Knightley and Ruffalo is where *Begin Again* attains its comic life. She is gawky and ebullient, but also prickly. He is excitable and affable, but slick with it. It feels faintly ridiculous to watch the two sharing a screen, and it's kinda meant to. For all its flaws and random CeeLo Green appearances, *Begin Again* has a wonderful and wordly weirdness that is well-suited to a tale of starting anew. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Keira Knightley holding a guitar is the definition of twee.*

2

ENJOYMENT. *Peculiarly empowering, and Knightley is great.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *All over the place tonally but heart and funny bone are in the right place.*

3



Finding Vivian Maier

Directed by **JOHN MALOOF, CHARLIE SISKEL**

Released **18 JULY**

Self-taught, street photographer Vivian Maier was discovered in 2007 when Chicago historian John Maloof bid on a box of negatives at a neighbourhood auction-sale. What he found began a five-year journey to uncovering the full, vast inventory of Maier's amateur output. She possessed a prolific talent that should have been her meal ticket and, had she wanted it, earned her a place among the pantheon of 20th-century career-photographers. That it didn't is the mystery Maloof unpacks with *Finding Vivian Maier*, his first foray into film. It follows two recently published books: one of her photographs, one of self-portraits.

There are two kinds of 'finding' at play in the film: finding Vivian, and finding Vivian out. The first concerns the proof of her existence. Maloof's treasure hunt ends at the ten-minute mark with his gaining access to a storage locker of Maier's belongings. This physical evidence includes a further 100,000 negatives, nearly 3000 rolls of undeveloped film, 150 eight and 16mm home movies along with 'tons' of audiotapes, buttons, teeth. These were the hoardings of a "pack rat", and with them he hopes to paint a picture of the woman behind the work. The extrapolation

of character is the far harder 'finding', which Maloof leaves, by and large, to nanny Maier's erstwhile wards.

Their reaction to the news of her success stand in for any reflection or summation on the part of our narrator. It's problematic that Maloof treats these testimonies like just more empirical by-product of a life – dependable as fact. The film's desperate, climactic half-hour sees Maier emerge a monster – the Nanny with a capital 'N'. She was a "wicked witch of the west", as accounts of her eccentricities (her men's clothes, her tramping walk, her motorised bicycle) take an hysterical turn. Did she force-feed a child in her care? Did she photograph a charge knocked down by a car? Did the Rolleiflex come first? Probably. Maybe. We can't be sure.

This lack of transparency is an accident, a failing of curation. Maloof is a hustler, an explorer, a sleuth. He is not a storyteller in a visual medium. Still, foolhardy though he is, he's a match for his subject. Look at how he lays out her things on his floor, in neat rows like printers' blocks. He has his own compulsions. His are organisational – but, like Maier, he preserves, collects and saves. As a would-be neutral narrator, he's rather

too interesting. Another film, by a third-party, might examine their relationship – the two-way traffic between one autodidact and another.

Despite her efforts at embalming herself in physical stuff and chemical film, Maier remains elusive to the end. It isn't enough that she took beautiful photographs. Without meaning to, the film proves that the power of human relationships are the only after-life, and the essence of a person expires at death. Having no family and few friends, Vivian, the woman, has gone up in smoke. **THIRZA WAKEFIELD**

ANTICIPATION. *Who was the "nanny photographer"? Go on then, let's see.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Evidently first-time filmmaking: careful, thoughtful work marred by reticent curation.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Downbeat and inconclusive, but likeable all the same.*

2



The Lady from Shanghai (1947)

Directed by **ORSON WELLES**

Starring **ORSON WELLES, RITA HAYWORTH, EVERETT SLOANE**

Released **25 JULY**

It's a matter of pure insanity that separates *The Lady from Shanghai* from its canonical noir brethren. Orson Welles' silver-tongued shadow play about a blue-collar sailor trapped in a high-class murder scheme is so nuts that it seems dreamed-up by an institutionalised screenwriter unloading their id while cackling manically. Its mad-hatter personality gurgles to the surface slowly at first; Glenn Anders' gonzo performance as a seedy blackmailing lawyer is the most glaring tell. But by the time this 1947 classic unloads a climactic shoot-out inside a hall of mirrors, it has gone full loony tunes, ending in a wild mesh of shattered German expressionism and savage human nature run amok.

Prized lug and imminent fall guy Michael "Black Irish" O'Hara (Welles) first sees the doe-eyed Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth) during a nighttime stroll through Central Park. He understands immediately that common sense will not be a factor in their relationship. "When I start out to make a fool of myself there's very little that can stop me," Michael says with a hint of glee. Elsa is indeed a looker, like so many blonde femme fatales of

Hollywood's Golden Age. But Hayworth is a unique kind of serpent, an expert at playing the victim even to the most cynical viewer familiar with the dangerous archetype she represents.

Slowly but surely Elsa convinces Michael to work aboard the yacht of her crippled husband (Everett Sloane) that's bound for San Francisco "by way of the canal." Despite a love affair that grows steamier by the nautical mile, Michael becomes wise to the vultures that surround him, even calling Elsa and Mr Bannister out for their self-righteous and destructive ways. His impassioned story about a sea of frenzied sharks cannibalising themselves is a perfect allegory for his employers' noir intentions.

All the globetrotting and gallivanting conceals a darker plot that leads to a series of elaborate double crosses set against the foggy windswept arena of San Francisco. Like its deceptive anti-heroine, this is where *The Lady from Shanghai* shows its true colours. Salacious threats, pummeling fistfights, and a daring mid-day escape involving pharmaceuticals are just a few of the plot points that feel heightened to the point of excess.

There comes a point where one must admit that *The Lady from Shanghai* is operating on a different wavelength to the viewer. Each shot is constructed to infuse reality with the nightmarish qualities of an alternate reality. Certain images stand out: sweaty close-ups of jury members; Mr Bannister's cane protruding from dark shadows; and Michael tip-toeing through a fun house dream sequence. The entire film is one big maze, a confounding dip into the skewed psyche of a woman tainted and defined by her past living and dying in the Far East. Forget it Michael, it's Chinatown.

GLENN HEATH JR

ANTICIPATION. *Can Rita Hayworth seduce us after all these years?*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Welles' black coffee noir is one messed up nightmare.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Time proves this to be insanely ambitious and batty in the best sense.*

5



The Congress

Directed by **ARI FOLMAN**

Starring **ROBIN WRIGHT, HARVEY KEITEL, JON HAMM**

Released **15 AUGUST**

Ari Folman is obsessed with representing the unrepresentable. His 2008 masterpiece *Waltz with Bashir*, an Adobe Flash seance of his repressed memories from the Lebanon war, was an urgent attempt to visualise the parts of ourselves that we've tried to forget. *The Congress*, his inelegant but intermittently fascinating new film, trips over itself to visualise what's left of ourselves after we've chosen to forget everything else. A balls out re-imagination of Stanislaw Lem's 1971 novel 'The Futurological Congress', Folman's film renovates the book's psychotropic utopian setting from the ground up, transforming Lem's post-Communist parody into a stoned but joyless defence of self-image in a world where it seems increasingly obsolete.

We begin on a close-up of Robin Wright, a single tear falling down her face as her long-time agent (Harvey Keitel) monologues about all the mistakes she has made. The agent's grandiose speech namechecks a number of the star's actual roles, but if Wright is playing herself, she's playing the actress we see and not the woman we don't. "You were the future, Robin. The promise, the answer." On film she's forever young, but in the movie business she's 45 and nearly washed up. The proposed solution is to digitise Wright and sell her image exclusively to Miramont Studios,

the suits preying on the her fear of being replaced by a new model. They walk her into a domed motion-capture machine that resembles the Times Square Ball, record every emotion she has and permanently separate her from the idea that people have of her.

In a world where Audrey Hepburn can be reanimated for a chocolate commercial, the technology hardly feels far-fetched, but the film is eager to stretch the idea into the unfathomable. Abruptly jumping 20 years into the future, Folman revisits Wright as she snorts an ampule of pink liquid in order to attend the Futurological Congress, which is being held in a vividly animated hellscape where people are able to live in the guise of celebrity avatars. An orgy of colour pollinated by the influences of the Fleischer brothers, Osamu Tezuka and Hieronymus Bosch, the second half of the film is where the intriguing sci-fi ideas of the first are unmoored from reality in order to become hypnotically hyper-literal.

The Futurological Congress is populated by the likes of John Wayne, Tom Cruise, Conan O'Brien, Gay Wolverine, Jared Leto Jesus, Bouncy Ball Hitler, each icon a reminder that when everyone is empowered to be whomever they want, no one is ultimately themselves (except maybe for Jon Hamm). The story flows

with the logic of a decreasingly lucid dream, Wright's quest to reunite with her son often enervating the same ideas that Folman is using it as a vehicle to explore, the filmmaker's sentimental interest in self-image never quite dovetailing with his attempts to expose futurism as an economic impulse that's fundamentally antithetical to true happiness. Epitomised by Max Richter's beautiful but humourless score, *The Congress* is a mess of fascinating ideas that are drawn and quartered by the emotions attached to them. How the film looks is almost inevitably at odds with how it sees itself. **DAVID EHRLICH**

ANTICIPATION. *Ari Folman's long-gestating follow-up to Waltz with Bashir.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Ambitious as hell, but it's a film that runs before it can walk.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *A great movie has been lost in the multi-coloured dreamscape.*

2



Night Moves

Directed by KELLY REICHARDT

Starring JESSE EISENBERG, DAKOTA FANNING, PETER SARSGAARD

Released 29 AUGUST



With *Night Moves*, American director Kelly Reichardt makes it five for five. She initially proffers a fastidious, Melvillian crime picture with special attention given to manual processes rather than human drama, but then elegantly pulls the focus back (with the help of a very subtle twist) in the second half to reveal that the caper at the film's centre was only included for context. The caper in question is the illegal demolition of a dam which resides on a lake in rural Portland, and it's a job that's being executed with the use of 200lbs of ammonium fertiliser and a cheap-o speed boat bequeathed the hipster legend, 'Night Moves'. And — to clear the record — though it has no real relation to the Arthur Penn movie from 1975 with which it shares a title, it does have a similar sense of '70s-style grit, melancholy and political pessimism.

Again, following in the trail of her existential range western, *Meek's Cutoff*, Reichardt refuses to trade in binary shades of good and evil. In Jesse Eisenberg's monosyllabic Josh, she presents a young man almost mechanically driven to achieve his goals, a person who is worried more about amply masking his internal fear than postulating on the potential downsides of his scheme. Reichardt also

appears very at ease with this material, even lapsing into the odd showman-like editing flourish or choosing to pay lip-service to frivolous, candy-coated genre mechanics. Peter Sarsgaard's character, a burn-out ex-Marine drafted in to assist with the pyrotechnics, adds some very dry humour to the brew, particularly in his verbal clashes with the ultra-meticulous Josh.

Eisenberg is the film's binding agent, his admirably Spartan central performance is as militantly unruffled as Delon in *Le Cercle Rouge*. Yet he always ensures that an underlying sense of utter despair is palpable, if not visible. Indeed, Eisenberg's customary clipped phrasing and precision-tooled performance style makes him perfect for a film about the fact that nothing and no-one can attain true perfection.

Yet this as much a film about eco terrorism as *Meek's Cutoff* was a film about the American gold rush, operating as a rich, sui generis parable for any and all acts of violence, whether micro-scale such as the one chronicled here, or those sanctioned by governments with a view to being executed in foreign climes. The film is clearly rooted in classical tragedy, and there's something noticeably Shakespearean about the manner in which the plot coyly unravels. Dakota Fanning's character, Dena, who makes

up one third of the terrorist trio, even develops a bizarre skin ailment as a physical reminder of her wrongdoing. And this is without mentioning the fact fraught and tender love triangle dynamic that could well be the catalyst for all these rash actions.

This is another stunning work from Reichardt. It's never preachy or polemical and always supremely refined and pure. What's so special about it is that Reichardt attains this bountiful subtextual depth and hardboiled psychological intensity with an absolute minimum of means. And all the while, it manages to grapple triumphantly with those primal philosophical notions of crime and punishment. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Reichardt is on a roll. Is it time to come a-cropper?*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Hells no. This is one rich and chilling movie that deals with the concept of violence in its most rudimentary state.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *Stellar work from all involved.*

5

Kelly Reichardt

Night Moves is Kelly Reichardt's first film to be shot digitally. Here, she weighs up the pros and cons of this modern format.

"This was my first film to be shot on digital. There's so much night time in this new film that I knew I didn't have the money to shoot on 35mm. And I couldn't afford to light 16mm. You need more lights otherwise it just gets really muddy. It's a smaller negative. We couldn't light a reservoir. So Chris Blauvelt — my DoP — and I decided on the Alexis camera, and we went with digital. It basically allowed us to make the movie. Everyone says it's lighter and faster, and I don't believe that. You have an IT guy on your set. I never had that when I was shooting on film. That's big. He's someone who I couldn't direct. Chris had to do that. On the other hand you're looking at something that's colour-timed while you're shooting. Your monitor is showing you the real image. I've always had the shittiest monitors in the world, so that's quite fantastic.

"My biggest gripe with digital, really, is that I just don't think it's as magical when you're watching it. It doesn't have that extra... thing. Movement is an issue. If you have a lot of light, movement always looks weird on digital. And that's kinda what cinema is, so that's a problem. You always have this small stutter. It's such a bummer when that appears. Let's just say it's not perfected yet, but I don't feel that I can complain as without it there would be nothing to complain about. It's a mix.

"I've heard about people shooting on digital and then projecting the film on 35mm, but I've never actually witnessed it. You can add film grain to your digital image to get rid of that cleanness. But if you're projecting on 35mm, that grain becomes inherent. And even referring to it as "grain" doesn't quite do it justice. If you're out filming and it's a perfect day and the light


is beautiful, there's something with digital that doesn't quite knock it to the point of magical. I think Chris did an amazing job of getting it to the look that it has. I think it's a good lookin' movie.

"We talked a lot to get that look for the film. A big guide for the production designer and costume designer were these paintings by Charles Burchfield. A lot of that had to do with colour and texture. I was trying to avoid textures too. I was trying to avoid the flatness that comes with digital. The only argument you can really make about film is that a lot of the stocks available have gotten so clean anyway, that you want more of an expressionistic feel to things. How can you get that? How can you get that naturally? Evangelists for digital will always bring up how clean and crisp it looks as a positive. But for me, that's the problem. I can see you now cleanly and crisply, so I don't need a movie to replicate that.



"You can choose lenses that help, you can add textures later and Chris was very innovative with the lighting. That guys has, like, never not been on a film set. I think he said that it's been pretty much constant for him since he was five years old. His grandfather was an assistant cinematographer, so he grew up on movie sets. He was Harris Savides' camera operator. He's not a cinephile at all, because he's never at home and never gets time to watch movies. His brother's a camera operator, too. It's a family thing. I give Chris movies to watch. We go into 'the bunker' together, as it were.

"It's hard to find cinephiles in the movie industry. I don't really deal with studio heads and types like that. But just young people who are interested in working on films. You talk to them and their film history goes back to 1980, and that's right where mine ends. It's a generational thing. I just find a lot of people interested in the life of making movies are not interested in film. They love the films they've worked on, but they don't reach back into the canon. They'll still be very good at their job, though.

"But finding the right cinematographer is hard. It's like finding the soulmate of your life. It's such a particular thing. It involves all the senses, not just your eyes. I always thought, 'Oh, you need a cinephile' That's what a cinematographer should be. But it's not actually true. You need someone who understands light. Chris works well for us because people like working hard for him, but he's just not an ego-based person. People talk about sexism in the movie business, and that's nowhere more prevalent than actually behind the camera. With Chris, I tell him where to put the camera, and he does it. It's his job to take it from there and just sweeten it." 



How to Train Your Dragon 2

Directed by **DEAN DEBLOIS**

Starring **JAY BARUCHEL, AMERICA FERRERA, KIT HARINGTON**

Released **11 JULY**



Packed with more gadgets than Batman's belt and boasting the most exhilarating fire-breathing action this side of the Seven Kingdoms, *How to Train Your Dragon 2* is a top-tier triumph of animated storytelling. It's also one of the most surprising and progressive films of its kind. Yet it's the beating human heart nestled beneath its glistening scaly exterior that really makes it soar.

Five years on from the events of the dazzling opening chapter, times have changed on the island of Berk. Where once dragons were hunted out of fear, now they've all moved in. It's a peaceful time for chief Stoick the Vast (Gerard Butler, having a blast) and his loyal tribesfolk, with the island's new favourite pastime, dragon racing, epitomising the harmonious alliance between man and beast.

For Hiccup (Jay Baruchel), the ability to glide above the clouds with best pal Toothless has given him a renewed sense of adventure. He spends his days exploring uncharted horizons while refining his dragon training and novelty inventing skills (flame-sword, anyone?), until the discovery of a hidden ice cave triggers an epic conflict that threatens to tear apart the fabric of Viking life.

Returning director Dean DeBlois could have been forgiven for playing it safe with this potentially tricky trilogy midpoint. Instead he ups the ante and takes some big risks along the way, introducing several major new characters and significantly expanding the dragon mythos while retaining the air of mystery that made the original so captivating. These are mostly calculated risks, but risks nonetheless, and it's testament to DeBlois' strength in conviction that nearly every one of them pays off.

The film's only notable blemish is its villain, a cutthroat creole dragon slayer voiced by Djimon Hounsou, the only non-white human character. While this ethnic minority representation is clearly problematic, *HTTYD2* otherwise marks a huge step forward in the portrayal of physical disability in mainstream family-oriented cinema. Having lost a leg at the end of the first film, Hiccup wears a prosthetic limb that not only looks cool as shit but also, crucially, is never depicted as a weakness. In fact, Hiccup is not the hero in spite of his disability, he's the hero because of it. It's a refreshing message delivered with a matter-of-factness that makes it all the more powerful.

So where does *HTTYD2* leave DreamWorks Animation? The runaway success of *Frozen* may have papered over the cracks of Disney's recent animated output, while Pixar's recent output has been subpar by their standards, but the reality is it's been a good four years since either company produced something packed with as much aesthetic, dramatic and emotional punch as this. Coupled with some subtly radical gender politics that place DreamWorks just behind Studio Ghibli as the world's most forward-thinking animation studio, *HTTYD2* is a high-flying joyride that will leave you floating on air. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *The original was an unexpected treat. Will the sequel manage to repeat the trick?*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Flies close to perfection.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *DeBlois has a job on his hands to top this third time round.*

4

On Set... With Jacques Gites

Dispatch Number Three: *Betty Blue*
September 1985

A beach, morning. The sun is barely up but already its heat has turned the spray of the Med to a warm salt haze. The cast and crew of *Betty Blue* appear hard at work. The film's director, Jean Jacques Beineix, is fresh from the success of his *La Lune dans le Caniveau*, which swept the board at the Cesars by winning Best Production Design. Bravely, he has adapted the 'unfilmable' Arnold Scrubbs novella, *Confessions of a Deckchair Attendant*, the tale of a lido bum who strikes it lucky with an absolute raver only to realise — *plus ça change!* — she's mad as a goose. In many ways, Jean was heir to the kind of filmmakers who had inspired me to pick up a pen with a little light on top, and give something back to the world: film criticism — the gift of insight into the greatest art form man has ever created. Which is also an artistic endeavour and not, as some would have it, the bitter dyspeptic ranting of eunuchs condemned endlessly to watch Casanova going at it like the clappers.

In any case, I was privileged to be spending the day at Gruissan-Plage with a key figure in the *cinéma du look* movement which, as I predicted, has proved at least as influential as the *nouvelle vague*. It was late summer 1985, and I was just back from a delightful stay in Tirana to launch my book, 'Captive Hearts: Love and Laughter in the Albanian Rom-com' (for the record, I always found the regime vile and never benefited from it financially. If I was guilty of anything it was a certain naïvety. Eating out was also stunningly good value. In today's money probably about 50 quid for four — six if you include the secret police minders, which we often did — with wine, or something quite like it, included).



Jean was shooting a shocking scene that morning, which culminated in the desecration of a mint-condition, classic Citroen DS with a slew of pink paint. This was before the advent of computer CGI so it was happening for real. The set was tense. There was only one chance to capture the near-total destruction of this elegant motor vehicle. The serious mood had even spread to the cast; so 'in character' was the film's star, Beatrice Dalle, that she looked right through me, despite our having been close friends during my time on Parisian fanzine 'Le Coq Snortif' back in '82. As editorial assistant she had proved a dedicated smoker and an endearingly straightforward critic of my, admittedly zany, gonzo pieces on the birth of French punk (*le ponque*). I now saw what a consummate professional she had become, as she sneered in my direction — a private joke recalling the exact expres-

sion she would use as she refused to make me coffee each morning at Coq Towers.

Even with the knowledge that the 'paint' was actually a strawberry milkshake for which Beatrice had hand-squeezed the fruit, I still find the finished scene a tough watch. Not simply because of the despoiling of the streamlined bodywork and revolutionary suspension of the DS — but also because of what the car symbolised. By taking this plain black icon of 1960s France, the stylish ride of the New Wave, and splashing blush milk all over its beautiful windscreen, Jean was giving notice to our heroes — Godard, Truffaut et al — that a new kind of filmmaking had arrived. Raincoats and smoking and black-and-white were over; tiny shorts, primary colours and plenty of side-boob shots were here to stay. It reminded me very much of the kind of pathfinding work Duran Duran were then achieving in the arena of the pop video.

I never did manage to catch up with Bea on set but I did get to see the scenes of frank nudity she had already shot, which I still consider a sort of coda to our relationship, so much of which remained unspoken. Yes, it was strong stuff, but this was the 1980s when artists such as Zalman King were challenging bourgeois notions of decency with a soft-focus, sax-tracked revolution. It was a different, more adventurous age when you could walk into any producer's office on the Boulevard St Germain and say: "I want to make a faux-intellectual portrait of obsession and female sexuality racked out with censor-baiting, painterly scenes of boho raunch" and leave with a fat contract and a novelty Joe Le Taxi saucisson. Today, that movie simply wouldn't get made 🍷



What If

Directed by **MICHAEL DOWSE**
 Starring **ZOE KAZAN, DANIEL RADCLIFFE, RAFE SPALL**
 Released **20 AUGUST**

Following the well-worn path taken by innumerable child stars and franchise standard-bearers, it comes as little surprise that Daniel Radcliffe — freed from his Hogwarts-embossed shackles — would pursue roles not just as far removed from a certain bespectacled wizard as possible, but also those that prove his chops as a Serious Actor. If few have entirely clicked thus far, it's certainly not for want of trying on his part, consistently proving himself a performer willing to push the boundaries of both his capabilities and the cinematic diet of his considerable fan base.

The kids didn't come out in droves for his engaging performance in last year's *Kill Your Darlings*, and what they'll make of his bedevilled slacker in shock-merchant Alexandre Aja's *Horns* remains to be seen. Yet, for all the gay sex and theatrical bloodbaths of his recent CV, it's his most commercial project to date — and most effectively straightforward piece of casting — that finally brings him closest to earning that capital A.

On paper, *What If* purports to subvert the traditional rom-com narrative by tackling the question of whether a close male-female friendship can remain just that, without escalating or disintegrating as a result of

mutual or one-sided attraction. On screen, it ultimately subverts very little, but so uniformly engaging are the performances and above-par the attention to character and dialogue, that its thinly-veiled generic qualities are easily forgiven.

If the film stutters through the nervy verbosity of its opening meet-cute, it doesn't take long to settle into a more agreeable rhythm. Radcliffe and co-star, Zoe Kazan, share an undeniable on-screen chemistry that sees the film through the more unbalanced elements of Michael Dowse's direction. A slapstick kitchen routine involving an open window and the laboured punchline to a drunken attempt at phone-sex veer closer to Richard Curtis than *Annie Hall*. Yet Dowse makes great use of his Toronto location, despite resorting too often to the twee overlaying of Kazan's work as an animator for whimsical effect.

Elan Mastai's sharp script (adapted from a play by TJ Dawe) makes fine use of its supporting cast. Adam Driver delivers his familiarly winning schtick as Radcliffe's flatmate, while Megan Park steals the funniest scenes as Kazan's bed-hopping sister. Yet it's Rafe Spall's turn as Radcliffe's would-be romantic rival — and Kazan's

long-term boyfriend — that prevents *What If* from offering an easy disentanglement of its knotty relationships. Where archetypically said character would be written as asshole/antagonist, instead we're given a genuinely good bloke who is clearly in love with his girlfriend. This adds weight to the moral and sexual dilemma at the heart of the film's will-they-won't-they set-up.

It's hardly a reinvention of the form, but there's more than enough warmth and smarts here to swiftly scupper any cynical preconceptions. More than anything, it offers Radcliffe's most mature performance to date, and he proves himself a gifted comic everyman in the kind of role it'd be great to see him pursue more often. **MATT THRIFT**

ANTICIPATION. *[Random rom-com title generator].*

2

ENJOYMENT. *Warm, funny and genuinely smart.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *A pleasant surprise. Radcliffe shines.*

3



Lilting

Directed by **HONG KHAOU**

Starring **BEN WHISHAW, CHENG PEI-PEI, MORVEN CHRISTIE**

Released **8 AUGUST**

“Do you know how it feels to be locked up by your own son, like a pet?” This is the accusation administered by an elderly mother to her only child early on in Hong Khaou’s *Lilting*, a distinctive and heartfelt debut feature. Audience members not fluent in Mandarin will read her words in subtitles, since Junn, the mother in question (played by famed Chinese actress Cheng Pei-peí), despite having moved to London decades ago, has never mastered English. She has, however, managed the odd F-word. Her son, Kai, torn between filial duty and the impossibility of revealing that Richard (Ben Whishaw), the “best friend” that he lives with, is more than just that, has opted to place his widowed mother in the most pleasant care home he could find, rather than take her under his own roof.

We soon realise that these early scenes lie somewhere between flashback and heightened memory; for Kai has died suddenly, leaving both Junn and Richard reeling at the loss of the person they both love the most. Richard, in an effort to come to terms with the tragedy (and to maintain his only living link with Kai) begins visiting the reluctant Junn, and even hires a translator to facilitate a late-autumn courtship between her and an English co-resident.

So begins a tentative, delicate dance between Junn and Richard, who continues to tip-toe around the true nature of his relationship with Kai. It’s very much a case of one step forwards, two steps back, as Richard does his best to respect the fact that — bereft of her family and her native culture — Junn’s grief is the most precious thing she has left.

Ageing, bereavement, prejudice, social dislocation, language barriers — Khaou meshes together an ambitious selection of themes, and his success belies the film’s simple set-up and understated tone. The flashback-heavy structure, aided by Stuart Earl’s ghostly, ambient score, creates a dreamlike, almost atemporal atmosphere. Yet Khaou seems so concerned with emotional landscapes over narrative momentum that at times the film risks simply dissolving into nothing.

That said, he commits to his aesthetic with great conviction. As with the soundtrack, Miren Marañón’s elegant, faintly trippy production design (Junn’s care home is steeped in retro décor, supposedly designed to make its elderly inhabitants feel more at ease) and Urszula Pontikos’s fine cinematography (following her recent stand-out work on *Weekend*, by another emerging Brit talent, Andrew Haigh) lend

the film a fragile beauty perfectly attuned to its subject matter.

To leaven the intensity, there are also fragments of gentle comedy in watching Junn and her gentleman friend come to realise that sometimes sweet nothings sound better left in foreign tongues. There are also tender observational details — like how Richard, having picked up Kai’s habits, not only cooks his bacon with chopsticks, but can’t remember how he ever managed a fry-up without them. Clearly a passion project for Khaou, *Lilting* is a lovingly composed mood piece, just not one that ever fully achieves dramatic lift-off. **SOPHIE IVAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Funded by Microwave, Film London’s scheme for first-time filmmakers — definitely worth a look.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *A thoughtful film whose lilting tones occasionally border on the listless.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Admired from a distance, this is a promising debut from Hong Khaou.*

4



The Wanderer

LWLies takes stock of David Gordon Green's supremely melancholic late work and makes a case for why you shouldn't take him for granted.

Who betide the filmmaker who doesn't maintain strict control of their narrative, for when you allow yourself to amble rather than move along with a purposeful stride, the press and the public, unclear as to what destination you're headed towards, may cease to be bothered with you at all.

Consider the strange case of David Gordon Green, whose film *Joe* opens in the UK in late July, having made barely a ripple during its stateside run, a fate shared by Green's last film, *Prince Avalanche*. I saw *Prince Avalanche* at last year's South By Southwest festival, where the hot tickets were Shane Carruth's *Upstream Colour* and Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers*. Carruth's cult stock had soared in the nine years since the release of his *Primer*, and Korine's film was a high-concept gambit loaded with talking points for the eggheads and postures that the cool kids could flatter themselves for recognising. Both generated a lot more excitement than a character-oriented actor's duet, a remake of an Icelandic movie by a director whose last outing had been a One Crazy Night comedy starring pre-prestige Jonah Hill. *Upstream Colour* is cinematographically wan and repellant in its attitude towards performance, *Spring Breakers* is a smug inside joke whose success depended on one's willingness to assume a place on the inside, but *Prince Avalanche*? It left me gutted.

Based on Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson's *Either Way*, with the setting transposed to Central Texas in the summer of 1988, *Prince Avalanche* stars Paul Rudd and Emile Hirsch as Alvin and Lance, an odd couple thrown together on a summer job painting median lines on a highway, freshly repaved in the aftermath of an apocalyptic forest fire.

(The film was shot in the area ravaged by the Bastrop County Complex fire, the worst wildfire in Texas history.) Alvin is a high-strung fussbudget, an intellectual dilettante who's perfecting his German but can't master workaday responsibility; Lance is Alvin's girlfriend's younger brother, a horny, hyperactive, insecure kid whose literary tastes run to comic books. They bicker and even come to blows, but then Alvin gets dumped and Lance finds himself a father-to-be, and they meet on the common ground of their self-doubt and heartsickness.

For the majority of the film, Rudd and Hirsch are practically the only people on screen, though there's a good supporting role for Lance LeGault — his last — as a raucous good ol' boy who swerves through this literal road movie, and Green seasons his casts with non-professionals, a practice which runs all the way back to his lauded debut, 2000's *George Washington*. The first-time performer here is Joyce Payne, a retiree whose home was destroyed in the Bastrop fire, who recites her own personal history onscreen while sifting through the ashes of her life. Left alone on a free weekend, Lance will visit the burned-out shell of Payne's house, where he privately acts out a "Hi, honey, I'm home" pantomime of domesticity — a moment which confirms Rudd as the finest physical comedian that we've got. I saw *Prince Avalanche* with an ex-girlfriend; we'd been talking about getting back together for ages, though it was evident by then that it was never going to happen, and that scene amid the ashes encapsulated the feeling of irreparable loss. Such sure-shot emotional accuracy is a rarity for which *Prince Avalanche* should be treasured — it's a small, direct, and above all personable movie, wistful and silly and, moment-to-moment, absolutely human and true.

Rudd's grace note was, presumably, a moment of improvisation, for *Prince Avalanche* was put together on the ground, its thin outline of a script embellished by on-site inspiration. The film was billed as a back-to-basics project for Green, who'd veered away from his "brand" with 2008's *Pineapple Express*, which aligned a director previously associated with dreamy, melic takes on regional subjects with the then-ascendant Judd Apatow comedy combine. When I interviewed Green shortly before the release of *Pineapple Express*, he mentioned a half-dozen in-the-works projects, including a remake of Dario Argento's *Suspiria*, adaptations from both John Kennedy Toole's 'A Confederacy of Dunces' and John Grisham, and a TV cartoon, none of which have seen fruition to date. Basically, he seemed interested in doing everything except what was expected of him.

The idea that Green was making a departure into comedy with *Pineapple Express* springs from a miscomprehension of what he was doing in the first place, as vernacular humour has always been an important element of his work. *Joe* is no exception, though among Green's films it's probably closest to his 2004 Terrence Malick-produced *Undertow*, a film which engaged with the Southern Gothic legacy generally, and with *Night of the Hunter* specifically. As in the Jamie Bell-headlined *Undertow*, *Joe* features another lost and endangered child. Here it's Tye Sheridan, the remarkably natural young actor who appeared in Malick's *Tree of Life* and Jeff Nichols' *Mud*. Sheridan stars as Gary, a 15-year-old whose peripatetic family has just moved into a new town. Gary's father, Wade (Gary Poulter), is an abusive and useless alcoholic, so the boy has to play family breadwinner, finding work with an outfit hired to poison trees so that they can be chopped down



legally. The boss of the gang, Joe (Nicholas Cage), is a 48-year-old functional alcoholic with a penitentiary stay in his past, but he's the nearest thing to a role model that Gary can grasp onto, and Joe reciprocates the boy's adulation with a paternal interest, protecting him from the various malevolent, demonic threats that come out in the countryside at night.

Joe ends with Gary out of harm's way and off to a new job, this one at a tree nursery, where he'll nurture rather than destroy. The film shares this overarching metaphor of razing and renewal with *Prince Avalanche*, and also makes room for nonprofessional performers, most notably Poulter, a lifelong lush who was cast off the streets of Austin, Texas for this, his first film, and whose corpse was discovered facedown in that city's Lady Bird Lake two months after the shoot ended. Poulter brings his existential presence to play, fresh to the camera, while Cage comes trailing his entire unwieldy screen legacy. Both men, however, are absolutely giving performances, and the lively cacophony that comes of different styles being thrown together is part of what makes *Joe* precarious and alive. If there is one throughline in Green's work, it's his delight at the sheer variety of the human species — and like Charles Ives, he relishes in the dissonance of the American symphony.

Although Cage is the son of a civilised university professor, he has been reprising the low-born bad-news rockabilly redneck for a significant part of his career, employing a Presley sneer through HI McDunnough, *Con Air*'s "Put the bunny down," Sailor Ripley, and Johnny Blaze, with his goblet of jelly beans. Cage has described his performance style as "Western Kabuki," which suggests that naturalism isn't exactly his highest aim. He couldn't play everyday people if he tried. I've seen Nic Cage in the flesh, and he resembles a Madame Tussaud's dummy of himself.

Cage's work is unusually scaled-back for much of *Joe*'s runtime. "What keeps me alive is

restraint," he says, though it's only be a matter of time before King Kong breaks his chains. The pairing of larger-than-life Cage and Green is a natural, for an understanding of the way that folk knowledge functions in the American consciousness is central to Green's work. *George Washington* wasn't about the General, First President, and Virginia slaveholder who really lived and died, but the beautiful ideal of him, the storybook ideal who could never tell a lie about chopping down a cherry tree and who threw a silver dollar across the Potomac River. It's about how that ideal might exist in the noble imagination of a 12-year-old black boy in a small town in North Carolina who is living with an awful secret.

Green's most widely-seen work was a piece of pop folk art, a two-minute commercial for Chrysler which played during the 2012 Super Bowl. A lean figure, seen in silhouette, casting a large shadow against a wall, strides towards the camera. Over images taken from all cross-sections of national life, the tall stranger recites a narration which, in extended metaphor, compares the current post-recession moment in history to halftime in an American football game. The figure emerges slowly from the shadows, but his identity has already been betrayed by his hoarse whisper, the property of that most self-consciously monumental of living actors, Clint Eastwood.

With its good-bad hero, placement of a certifiable movie star amid a mostly-amateur cast, and a tale of redemptive self-sacrifice, *Joe* isn't so far in eccentric spirit from Eastwood's 2008 film, *Gran Torino*, though the pleasure of the movie is in its queer digressions rather than its messianic pretense. In fact, Green's greatest work of recent years is in a television serial that skewers the heroic yarn while confirming its totemic power. *Eastbound & Down*, following the travails of foul-mouthed former baseball pitcher Kenny Powers (Danny McBride) after being busted down from the Major Leagues, finished its fourth and final series on the HBO network

in the fall of 2013. Powers is an egomaniacal self-styled demigod — nicknames include "The People's Champion, The Shelby Sensation, The Reverse Apache Master, The Man with the Golden Dick, Dr Cock & Balls" — and the show gets horselaughs from the disparity between his exalted imagination of himself and his frequently dismal reality.

Powers is the creation of McBride who, like Green, was a graduate of the North Carolina School for the Arts, and whose malapropism-riddled dialect-comic delivery was already perfected by the time he made his first screen appearance as "Bust-Ass" in Green's 2003 *All the Real Girls*. (McBride is also a producer on *Joe*, and appeared in both *Pineapple Express* and Green's 2011 *Dungeons & Dragons* stoner comedy *Your Highness*, in which someone made the perverse decision to rob McBride of his greatest comic gift by forcing him to wrangle with an English accent.)

Green directed 12 of the 29 total episodes, usually the more introspective and melancholy ones. Powers is the manic-depressive hero-narrator of his own tall-tale, his florid braggadocio marking him as the descendant of one of Mark Twain's profane raftsmen. But he regularly lapses into drift, loses sight of his sense of Manifest Destiny. These are the moments Green handles — for example, the episode where Kenny, now wed to the love of his life, tries and fails to cop a discreet extramarital BJ during a debauched overnight at a waterpark. Green was a vital contributor to the success of this rambunctious and democratically-offensive magnum opus, which plays on the fetishisation of the comeback story, as prevalent in the arts as it is in sports. And to borrow from the Eastwood commercial, it's Halftime in Green's career — only 39 now, he may yet be crammed into an ill-fitting comeback narrative and catapulted back into fashion. In the meantime, this devotee of the American idyll is enjoying some lovely wilderness years 🍷



Joe

Directed by **DAVID GORDON GREEN**

Starring **NICOLAS CAGE, TYE SHERIDAN, RONNIE GENE BLEVINS**

Released **25 JULY**

On the back of his 2012 palate cleanser, *Prince Avalanche*, the idea of David Gordon Green's "resurrection" is now accepted as gospel. The intermittently interesting career choices of Nicolas Cage, however, are only buoyed by the slate of otherwise-mediocre VOD-primed filler — how quickly we can forget [insert any of his 45 recent films here]. And so *Joe* arrives with far less skepticism than parties responsible for *The Sitter* might usually receive. Whether their pairing is an idea so crazy it just might work or simply "different" enough to be worth accepting at face value is for each individual viewer to decide.

Green and Cage are at their best when getting down and dirty, something *Joe* provides in bulk across its two uncompromising hours. A few jokes about hick life notwithstanding, the familiarity of its boy-and-his-guardian tale — so familiar that it's even appeared in Tye Sheridan's short-but-impressive filmography, thanks to *Mud* — is one of the few comforts supplied herein. What initially strikes as a narrative deficiency in Gary Hawkins's script emerges, scene after scene, as an appreciably simple character piece. True to the destructive culture its characters navigate on a day-by-day basis, the film's through-line has a frequent, intentional

mundanity that's broken apart by sudden, cutting violence. The impact of this violence is inevitably and sadly swallowed by a swift reset to the basics of lackadaisical Southern life.

Green's feel for people and place is appropriately precise, and the relationship between outdoor and indoor spaces is of particular interest. The action which occurs in nature is often caustic and manic, reflected in a verité shooting-style and harsh editing. Interior space is more secure, offering time for contemplation. These spacial counterpoints are as carefully sketched as the relationship between Cage's bear-like Joe and Sheridan's tragic, latchkey dreamer, Gary. That they never feel entirely comfortable with one another might be part of a larger point the film is making: in a land this unforgiving, even the comfort of idle friendship can't always be depended upon.

It's these elements which make *Joe* something of an uncomfortable film, alternately lapsing as it does into overwhelming darkness or incongruous fun. One instance: a montage of the pair gallivanting about to some rollicking rock tune while searching for a dog which arrives directly after that same dog has been made to kill a fellow canine in a dirty, low-lit whorehouse while Joe issues anxiety-driven commands for fellatio.

At these points, the film feels like it is stretching itself too far. *Joe* is otherwise commendable for a single-track mindset, impressive in how neatly oscillates between seedy crime plotting and knockabout hang-outs.

Fitting, then, that while Green's formalism isn't enough to truly galvanise the material, it might be telling that his few visual flourishes (e.g., the occasional use of slow-motion) register more as stylistic sore thumbs. And yet, this Arkansas native feels more at home with *Joe* than any project of recent years. If what we've been seeing as of late are small steps back into grace, the timidity is to be appreciated. He might've just wished to lighten up a bit. **NICK NEWMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Cage and Green is an unusual pairing.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *A miserable setting is just the trick for a compelling tale.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Exudes a quiet determination that American cinema could use more of.*

3



Norte, the End of History

Directed by LAV DIAZ

Starring SID LUCERO, ANGELI BAYANI, ARCHIE ALEMANIA

Released 18 JULY



The two big talking points about the latest film by Filipino director Lav Diaz are its running time (250 minutes, slender by the director's standards) and its apparent source material: Fyodor Dostoyevsky's 'Crime and Punishment', that old chestnut of existential literature which was written 150 years ago yet feels applicable to any time and place in history. For instance, the Philippines circa now, where a law student murders a mean-spirited moneylender and gets away scot-free while an innocent man is incarcerated for the crime.

On these two talking points it should be said that, 1) *Norte, the End of History* is really no fleeter than such super-sized predecessors as 2001's *Batang West Side* or 2004's *Evolution of a Filipino Family* and, 2) The comparisons by critics to Dostoyevsky, while hardly unwarranted shouldn't overwhelm the rest of the film's achievements, which transcend mere adaptation. No less than Jia Zhangke's similarly magisterial *A Touch of Sin*, *Norte* is a sharply etched portrait of a society divided not between haves and have-nots but rather people who to slightly greater or lesser extents have next to nothing.

For instance, Fabian (Sid Lucero), our law student, is cash-poor ("Adam Smith won," he moans) and unable to convert his cultural

capital into anything but complaining — which is where stabbing the moneylender comes in. An avowed and loud advocate of rebellion who talks enthusiastically about the Philippines' long-ago uprising against its Spanish colonisers, Fabian is an ideologue in need of a fall guy; Joaquin (Archie Alemania), a married father-of-two with money problems of his own, is already wobbly on account of a broken leg and is rather easily tipped over. A member of those oppressed lower classes that Fabian is always ranting about, Joaquin more suitably fits the criminal profile hastily constructed around the victim's death and so suffers the consequences of the younger man's convulsive spasm of lethal class warfare.

The underlying allegory here, of a literally and figuratively poor soul bearing the brunt of a more affluent man's crime, is not subtle, but Diaz's strategy is to couch his sociopolitical analysis in a languorous real-time style that serves to mute any points being scored. This is not a criticism; part of what's so compelling about *Norte* is how it places what is basically a potboiler plot inside a contemplative artistic space and integrates the two modes at what feels like a molecular level.

There are moments when it seems that

Diaz is mining other sources beyond 'Crime and Punishment'; Joaquin's extended sojourn behind bars plays on (though never succumbs to) prison-drama conventions, while his wife Eliza's (Angeli Bayani) attempt to raise their children alone gestures slightly towards Mizoguchi's melancholy melodramas about tragically discarded women. It's not so much that the director is swinging for the fences of film history as he's collapsing the distance between his own film culture — which is still primarily regarded as exotic by Western programmers and festival gatekeepers — and the rest of cinema — even as at the same time *Norte* stands apart by dint of its length and general severity. **ADAM NAYMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *The first film by Filipino director Lav Diaz to receive a UK release.*

5

ENJOYMENT. *Detailed, rich, complex filmmaking.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *A huge investment is eventually repaid.*

4

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Grand Central

Directed by **REBECCA ZLOTOWSKI**
 Starring **TAHAR RAHIM, LÉA SEYDOUX, OLIVIER GOURMET**
 Released **18 JULY**

The following is fact, not propaganda: nuclear energy is the cleanest, most efficient energy source currently available to humanity. It's also the most viable replacement for greenhouse gas-emitting sources like coal or gasoline, and has ten times fewer deaths associated with its production than either of those industries. Except, of course, when a nuclear power plant melts down.

The idea of harnessing such power, as well as the tension between the methodical and unbridled chaos, is a fantastic metaphor for love, which is the idea that powers Rebecca Zlotowski's *Grand Central*. Gary (Tahar Rahim) is a shiftless youth who, along with two friends, takes on a low-level, high-risk job at a plant in the North of France. His co-workers are taciturn, working class tough guys that live in caravans, beat their girlfriends, drink away their inflated paycheques, and, above all else, have a tremendous sense of pride. Taken in by this burly band of brothers, Gary soon falls for Karole (Léa Seydoux), the fiancée of Toni (Denis Ménochet), one of his superiors. Leaving the noisy, antiseptic world of the plant behind, they rendezvous on an overgrown riverbank. These are undoubtedly the film's strongest and most moving visual flourishes: during one such stolen moment, Rahim rows Seydoux further downstream, the moonlight

gently filters through leaves and on to the trees above, a range of cooler colour shades that are rarely captured with digital cameras.

Their affair underscores the other major theme of the film, which is the concept of working and thinking as an individual versus as a team. Gilles, the man who trains Gary and his pals (played with bullish aplomb by the pot-bellied Olivier Gourmet) attempts to impart the importance of working together through many small "teaching moments," for the inability to do so means death. (One very real moment involves Gilles asking Gary to carry a bottle of water, not telling him that it's meant to be shared, and then screaming at him when he guzzles the whole thing.) However, the plant's hierarchies are less interesting than the intricate procedures they carry out to protect themselves and maintain the plant against the "invisible enemy" of radiation.

The degree of technical detail makes the film feel almost like a documentary at times, but Zlotowski's intentional avoidance of psychology ends up oversimplifying her salt-of-the-earth subjects. While a detailed exposition of how Karole ended up in this dead-end job is refreshingly absent, the fact that she always appears wearing the same tank top and daisy dukes makes her seem more like some trashy Barbie doll than a real

person. It's also unclear why Karole is attracted to either of the men she's with; everyone else's actions are attributable to a combination of debt or some animalistic sense of duty.

Late in the film, one of the main characters fakes their radiation readings because they don't want to lose their contract, taking on harder and harder jobs and spewing blood into their ventilator mask. Such obstinate sacrifice is far more common than many would like to believe, especially in service of powering a mobile phone or hair dryer. But these figures remain "othered" by an unfeeling and distant camera. Missing this opportunity to truly humanise these workers, the film instead becomes another tale of coiled lust, albeit one with a very interesting backdrop.

VIOLET LUCCA

ANTICIPATION. *A nuclear powered love story in Northern France* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Its individual parts are greater than its sum total.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *Alternately fascinating and frustrating.* **3**



Mood Indigo

Directed by **MICHEL GONDRY**
 Starring **AUDREY TATOU, ROMAIN DURIS, OMAR SY**
 Released **1 AUGUST**

What if the world around us reacted directly to our emotions? It would be a jumbled, chaotic, manic experience. And that is exactly what Michel Gondry delivers in his adaptation of Boris Vian's 1946 surrealist novel, 'Froth on the Daydream'. In his heyday, Vian hung out with jazz legend Duke Ellington and existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, both of whom get more than a look-in in this spirited and frenetic tribute.

Gondry's romantic sci-fi follows putrefying bride Chloe (Audrey Tatou) who, shortly after getting married to inventor Colin (Romain Duris), develops a terminal case of a water lily growing in her lung. We first meet Colin shuffling around his bright and busy apartment with lawyer and budding chef Nicolas (Omar Sy) readying themselves for the arrival of friend and Jean-Sol Patre-obsessive Chick (Gad Elmaleh). Viewed through this prism, the film delivers a plethora of ideas and references which beg to be untapped post-viewing.

This motley crew's every move is governed by a pastel-wearing cadre of workers who sit on a conveyor belt of spinning typewriters, randomly penning a line of narrative for the world below. A grand hub doles out revelry and madcap adventures gilded with underlying menace

which eventually descends into a dystopia of disease, bitter matrimony and poverty. Colin's dream of happiness collapses as he is forced to find a job to pay for Chloe's treatment. He then realises Chick is stealing from him in order to get his Patre fix. When Colin is stripped of his freedom and forced to harvest munitions for the government, *Mood Indigo* shifts into Orwellian nightmare territory, adopting the grim yet inspired aesthetic reminiscent of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*. Despite the darkness, Gondry does provide a beacon of hope in the form of a mouse (a man in a suit of course) who inhabits Colin's abode and is determined to make the long arduous journey out of suffocating frenzy for the sake of art.

Gondry is most interested in reflecting his characters emotions through the physical, and with his imaginative creations that whizz across the screen at a break-neck pace, the dialogue becomes a pitter-patter of childlike fancy. Though there's method in his madness with the colourful palette dulling as the film progresses and the pace slowing as Chloe's condition gets worse. This does, however, provoke an unexpected craving for the loud, bright menagerie of invention, and the inclusion of a grown female character who

utters the words "I don't like boys who say horrid things in front of girls" really has no place in the modern world.

The director's customary Wonka-like symposium of cultural references is on full throttle here as he assembles intricate stop-motion, mini-oven canapés, Rubix Cube diaries and a Cronenbergian-like creation of a doorbell bug to dizzying effect. In fact, there's quite a few similarities between *Mood Indigo* and Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, not least their abstract nature, but also their commitment to fashioning an impressionistic portrait of a fierce literary source. **KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN**

ANTICIPATION. *The man who sent Björk to get her teeth checked by a gorilla dentist pays tribute to the creator of the Pianocktail.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Gondry untamed is a visual genius.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *But he doesn't give Vian's ideas enough room to breathe.*

3

Michel Gondry

LWLies chats with the French dreamweaver about *Mood Indigo*, his unruly take on a famous Boris Vian novel.

INTERVIEW

Michel Gondry has been a fan of Boris Vian's novel *Mood Indigo* since he first read it aged 14. We heard from the director of such modern gems as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *The Science of Sleep* on transferring ideas to the screen, how first love drained the colours from his world and the inventive process of securing Audrey Tautou as his female lead.

LWLies: What steps do you take to transfer something from your imagination into a feature film?

Gondry: It's very scary because you have an idea that's immaterial and then you have to materialise it. At some point you think, 'Wow in six months this will exist and people will watch it on a screen!' But how it works, well, there are different things. You can do drawings, you write the screenplay and other technical aspects. And then there's horrendous effort of convincing every technician, actor and producer that it is possible.

When *Mood Indigo* starts it's bursting with colour, but towards the end it's much greyer. For you, is the world more colourful when life is going well and then darker when it's not?

I have a clear memory of my first love. It was a love story that didn't happen. When I was between 12 and 15, I was in love with a girl who was in my class. She liked me very much but... how do you call it... 'friend zone'. She wrote me a letter which she gave to me before she left for her summer holidays and asked me to come and collect it so I went with my bicycle. It was the most beautiful day, it was sunny, there were

leaves on the trees and flowers everywhere and she gave me the letter. Then she left and I read the letter and it was to tell me she was not in love with me. I don't know whether it was written there or I found out later but she actually loved my big brother. I remember clearly when I went back home, the sky was black, and I thought, "I will never experience colour again in my life".



Do you think your films help people to reintroduce colour into their lives?

A lot of couples told me they went to see *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and got reunited. They were at a difficult place in their life and then, by watching the movie, they sort of fell in love again. The only down side is that I do a movie and think, 'Okay, girls will love this movie and they're going to be attracted to me and it's going to have a nice impact on my life'. And then everyone who comes to congratulate me is in a couple.

Maybe you need to make more devious movies that drive people apart.

Yes but I don't think I can force myself into doing that.

You pitched the role of Chloe to Audrey Tautou in an unusual way...

I did an animation that was two minutes long that portrayed me in Brooklyn waking up and writing her a letter. I fly into the sky to Paris and give it to her. Then because the window closes on my arm, my arm was cut and I had to be driven to the hospital. She reads the letter and it reads, 'Dear Audrey, I want you to be in my next movie. I always thought of you for the main character, for the girl character.' At the same time I get to the hospital, there is a dog who has been in a car accident. It goes to the hospital and they mix up his leg with my arm and then when I say, "Action!" on the first day I have a dog's arm instead of my arm.

Did you make a cartoon for Romain Duris?

I just do cartoons for girls. No, it's not true. I do cartoons for friends if I do something stupid to them and want to show my apology.

What is the meaning of 'Mood Indigo'?

First of all it's a song by the famous jazz musician Duke Ellington, but I think indigo is the colour of a certain type of mood that you feel when you're in love.

Can cinema induce mood indigo?

Yes 🍷

Audrey Tautou

LWLies meets the French leading lady whose latest role sees her getting a severe case of the blues.

With her elfin elegance and poised performance style, Audrey Tautou was a natural choice to play the physically delicate and refined Chloe in magical realist love story *Mood Indigo*. *LWLies* spoke with the sweet, slightly guarded Tautou about having her usual acting methods shaken up by the wild and unpredictable directorial style of Michel Gondry.

***LWLies*: How did you prepare for the role of Chloe?**

Tautou: I had a few ideas of how I wanted to act her but when I arrived on the set Michel Gondry had created such a mess that the ideas I had before coming were totally impossible. For the first time I had no idea how my acting would look. Usually I'm very precise. I really like to compose characters. In a discreet way, but to compose them. On this shoot, it was such a mess. There was no ceremony made of the filming, no clap, no silence. The camera was always rolling and you didn't know if the camera was trained on you or somebody else. As you come to the end of a scene, you go straight back to the beginning again. So you just have to let go, trust and think, 'We'll see...'.

Did you find it stressful working in this way?

At first it was weird because I didn't have anything to hold on to, none of the reference points that I usually have while shooting. After I understood, I just had to accept it as very new experience. And I loved it.

Did you feel like you were working inside Michel Gondry's imagination?

Yes and Michel Gondry's imagination is really something. I wouldn't like to live in his brain because it is twisted and he has 100 ideas per day.



Is it true that you experienced his creativity even before the film, because he made you a cartoon, 'A Letter to Audrey'?

That's how he asked me to do the movie. When I watched this animation thing I thought, 'No, I can't be right. Does he wants me to be involved in this movie? This is something that I don't understand'. Because the animation was a very 'Michel Gondry' thing, so it involves a lot of fantasies. I told him that I didn't understand it and he said, 'I want you to do the movie'. I thought that was a wonderful gift.

How do you feel about playing a role where you are a damsel in distress who is depending upon a knight in shining armour?

The only thing I feel is that their story is unfair and sad. I really like romantic love stories and for me it's a love story. That's the reason why it's so charming. But it's true.... She's sick and he's the knight but it doesn't end as a fairy tale. Like life, most of the time.

You're careful with the films that you do. What kind of roles do you find yourself turning down?

I don't like female parts when they are just there to serve the man. I don't refuse specific roles. It depends on if it's interesting. I like parts that have a journey, I like parts that are useful for the story and I like unique adventures. I want to feel that this story or this shoot will bring me something new. It's not only about the part, it's also about what the experience will be around it.

Do you think female actors at the top of their game are still getting offered parts where they are there to look pretty?

No I don't think so, but there are fewer films with a female heroine than with a male one. Look at superheroes. No women. Only men.

What do you love about movies?

It just extracts you from your world, your personal world. That's what I like. When you watch a movie you are out of your life and I like that. It's a little bit the same thing that I feel when I'm acting. That I'm removed from my life. And it's great 🍷

Home Ents

Chris Marker Collection

Directed by **CHRIS MARKER**

Released **2 JUNE**

Format **DUAL FORMAT DVD AND BLU-RAY**



Prior to his death in 2012 at the age of 91, French film-essayist, meta-anthropologist, cine-revolutionary and all-round super enigma Chris Marker was known primarily for two films: 1962's scintillating "photo-roman", *La Jetée*, and 1983's philosophical dream essay, *Sans Soleil*. UK distributor Soda Pictures are attending to the Lord's work by releasing this vital collection of medium-length films and short works to allow Markerphiles to fill in some of the banks. On the Blu-ray disc are two early films which present the director as a fully-formed thinker and image sculptor from the off. 1956's *Sunday in Peking*

sees Marker examining social and cultural manners in various locales of the Chinese capital. It feels like a trial run for his 1957 follow-up, *Letter from Siberia*, which offers a digression heavy survey of late-communist Siberia that mixes in maps, jokes, political postulation and even an animated interlude involving the entire life-cycle of the woolly mammoth.

The accompanying DVDs contain a clutch of Marker's short works, many of which are of a more poetically experimental register. The directly political *Description of a Struggle* from 1960, 1968's

The Sixth Side of the Pentagon and 1973's *The Embassy* capture three stages of political unrest and youth uprising in the '60s and early '70s. 1991's *Theory Of Sets*, meanwhile, demonstrates Marker's interest in computer graphics and gaming technology, retelling the story of Noah's ark with blocky 8-bit tableaux. The final film in the set is his brilliant 2004 work, *The Case of the Grinning Cat*, in which Marker wanders around Paris looking for guerilla murals of a smiling cat and then cleverly links them to the post-9/11 protest movement. **DAVID JENKINS**

Independencia (2009)

Directed by **RAYA MARTIN**

Starring **SID LUCERO, ALESSANDRA DE ROSSI, TETCHIE AGBAYANI**

Released **28 JULY**

Format **DVD**



Harboured and reckless is the critic who attempts to parse Raya Martin's spellbinding 2009 film *Independencia* without making at least a passing reference to old movies. In articulating the story of a close-knit Filipino family unit and their travails and struggles in a far-flung tropical glade in the late nineteenth century, Martin channels the lambent, dreamlike quality of early silent cinema. His images literally glow on the screen, as if they are being viewed by an innocent newborn whose eyes are still adjusting to the light. These ethereal pulses lend the film a richly nostalgic quality, yet the archaic shooting

method never translates as empty gimmickry, more an ingenious dovetailing of form and content. A mother dies, a son is born, the country succumbs to violent takeover, desire is internalised, storms rage and the unforgiving natural backdrop makes the business of living increasingly arduous.

The film does employ dialogue, but it's used sparingly, as *Independencia* is more concerned with the possibility of survival and happiness existing in a self-made enclave that is set away from the evils of squalid urbanism and gunboat colonial upheaval. It recalls FW Murnau's *Tabu* and Robert Flaherty's *Nanook*

of the North, though Martin shuns any allusions towards documentary, instead building his leafy idyll entirely on a soundstage. It's a song to self-reliance and the will to exist, but also a metaphor for the birth, growth and near-death of cinema itself. As the film progresses, Martin breaks out the in-camera effects and the swirling sound design, capping things off with a heartbreaking *coup de cinema* in which history is measured by the technological leaps in the photochemical process. In this film, which was exhumed from the archives by those canny folks at SecondRun DVD, the camera is the hero. **DAVID JENKINS**

Home Ents

The Essential Jacques Tati Blu-ray Collection

Directed by **JACQUES TATI**

Starring **JACQUES TATI**

Released **21 JULY**

Format **BLU-RAY**



So popular and enduring are the films of twinkled-toed French genius Jacques Tati, they have been available to view on many formats and for many years now. Yet it's surely a cause for celebration that, for the first time, all six features have been packaged together in a single collection along with all the short films and swathes of new extras. For those familiar with Tati's directorial manner, he was a film artist who took the geography and topography of every frame he filmed very seriously indeed, producing works which seek to confound the human eye and constantly redefine the staid

concept of the "gag". Of 1967's *Play Time*, critic Jonathan Rosenbaum famously stated that it's a film which you not only need to view multiple times, but each time from a different vantage point in the cinema auditorium. The titles here stretch from his glorious skewering of colloquial French manners, 1949's *Jour de Fête*, through to his ambling fun-poke at the modernism and its incompatibility with human behaviour, 1958's *Mon Oncle*, and TV-movie swansong *Parade* from 1974, an antiquated circus performance cleverly masquerading as an essay on magic, childhood and innocence.

His collected oeuvre tells the complex story of his righteous attempts to democratise comedy — to modestly remove it from the hands of the starring clown (himself) and place it into the hands of the people. His films are all non-narrative and are built around the ironic concept of capturing small nuances on large canvases. They hark back to the work of the great silent comedians, Chaplin and Keaton, but also further still, to the quotidian humour located in those early experimental tableaux by the Lumière brothers. Essential is right. **DAVID JENKINS**

Harold and Maude (1971)

Directed by **HAL ASHBY**

Starring **BUD CORT, RUTH GORDON, VIVIAN PICKLES**

Released **14 JULY**

Format **BLU-RAY**



The overriding feeling that results from watching whackdoo cult fave *Harold and Maude* is, how the gosh darn did this movie ever get made? Where some may see the winsome, loved-up imaginings of a morbidly inclined teenager in a double-breasted tweed suit frolicking in the meadows with his aged dream date and her umbrella, others will envision a oval-table surrounded with corpulent, pony-tailed Paramount execs weeping into their long-lunches and floundering to make sense of what exactly they've just paid for. Maybe director Hal Ashby and writer Colin Higgins pitched the film as, "*The Graduate* for the Laurel Canyon

set", neglecting to mention the dry, anarchic sense of humour, the double-barrelled anti-militarist diatribes, splatter interludes and a storyline which puts paid to the '60s notion that free love was all awesome happy times. Clearly an important influence on directors such as Wes Anderson and Richard Ayoade (and the reams of filmmakers who make films they might self-describe as (retch) "quirky"), *Harold and Maude* has perhaps been prematurely enshrined as a beloved, radical object and, the fact is, it's really rather a precious and transparent protest movie which never manages to find a truthful connection between its characters.

It comes across as a second-tier Roald Dahl story, but lacking a precise message. Cat Stevens' soundtrack is weapons-grade twee, while Ruth Gordon's wide-eyed take on the daffy, devil-may-care pensioner, Maude, places her clearly in the realms of fantasy and, as such, leaves the film lacking the courage of its heartfelt convictions. As glum, lisping naïf Harold, Bud Cort makes for an cosy counterpoint to his mad mother (Vivian Pickles) and Maude, but he did the same thing so much better the year before in Robert Altman's birdshit aria, *Brewster McCloud*. This pristine Masters of Cinema Blu-ray comes with a booklet of new essays on the film. **DAVID JENKINS**

IndieLisboa



FEATURE

These days, it's disastrously clichéd to note that IndieLisboa and many film festivals like it, are struggling in the face of rapidly diminishing subsidies. Apparently unperturbed by such gloomy forecasts, however, Lisbon's international festival of independent cinema is a bright buoy stubbornly bobbing the waves. Though the continued practicality of their current working model is open to debate, for the festival's eleventh edition, co-directors Nuno Sena and Miguel Valverde delivered another sensibly-sized programme which boasted some of the better titles previously showcased by more insidiously attractive juggernauts. Confidence and experience go a long way indeed.

Among such films was Sébastien Lifshitz's hour-long documentary, *Bambi*. Following the director's accessible and celebratory *Les Invisibles*, *Bambi* narrows its focus to one Marie-Pierre Pruvot, who was born in 1935 and whose adolescence was often spent fighting homophobia and transphobia before she became one of France's first transsexuals. Comparatively muted, the documentary chimed well with *Naomi Campbell*, the feature-length debut by Chileans Nicolás Videla and Camila Donoso, in which a 22-year-old transgender woman longs for gender reassignment surgery.

Whereas Lifshitz's mid-lengther is a straightforward, interview-heavy memoir, Videla and Donoso profitably mirror the fluidity of their protagonist's gender with a seamlessly rendered docudrama aesthetic. Subtly backdropped by examples of a media perpetuating cartoonish ideas of masculinity, *Naomi Campbell* is smart, unsentimental and occasionally touching, with at least one irresistible moment: that in which a secondary but charming character sings and dances to camera.

Song is the central theme of Sérgio Tréfaut's *Alentejo, Alentejo*, an impressive documentary all about cante — a style of singing indulged in by male and female choirs from Alentejo, a region in south-central Portugal known for its wide range of agricultural industries. Deeply rooted in these labour traditions, the songs — 26 of which feature in the film — are as stirring as they are enduring. Receiving its world-premiere at Lisbon, the film was also awarded the festival's jury prize for Best Portuguese Feature Film.

Threads of geo-specific musicality also weave through Chris Gude's *Mambo Cool*, an evocative, slow-burn riff on black coffee and other, more illegal forms of intoxication on the salsa-driven social margins of Colombia. Featuring some infectiously terrific dancing in its latter stages especially, *Mambo Cool* is as

evocative of place as Virgil Vernier's 20-minute short *Andorre*. If Gude's spaces are bruised and fractured despite their plentiful colour, Vernier suggests the remote, mountainous country of Andorra — which borders both France and Spain — is a dystopian nightmare made flesh. The latter film was one of a handful of excellent shorts and mid-length films to screen under IndieLisboa's reliably high-quality 'Emerging Cinema' section.

You won't find a better short and mid-length pairing in one sitting this year than that which featured London-based Cristina Picchi's prize-winning *Zima* and Yugoslav-born Matjaž Ivanišin's *Karpopotnik*. Covering everyday life in (and the exceptional landscapes of) a Siberian winter, *Zima* resonates with the glacial pace, icy doggedness and somehow innate melancholy of its setting. *Karpopotnik*, meanwhile, retraces the steps of Yugoslav 'Black Wave' filmmaker Karpo Godina, who shot a travelogue across five villages in what is now rural Serbia in the '70s. Combining Godina's original 8mm footage with his own imagery, Ivanišin adds poignant and lyrical narration to a powerful and moving fabric of local customs, costumes and colour. Over a deceptively simple 47 minutes, the film looks back with warmth — and onward to even gentler horizons.

Sheffield Doc/Fest



FEATURE

The power of the written word proved an enduring theme in the path which *LWLies* forged through the programme of the UK's premier documentary festival. As a celebration of ideas and long-form dissention of received cultural and political narratives, Martin Scorsese and David Tedeschi's densely layered and editorially sharp history of *The New York Review of Books*, *A 50 Year Argument* proved a patient and rewarding guide to the key texts and working methods of the legendary publication.

The fearsome intellect of editor Robert Silvers was the quiet centrifuge at the heart of the paper's 50 years of debate, having pored over some 15,000 articles drawn from the leading minds in American letters over the course of the magazine's history. The filmmakers follow Silvers' lead in allowing space for themes and ideas to develop, crafting a film propelled by the rhythm of language, enriched by the astute simplicity of the accompanying montage.

Susan Sontag was an essential firebrand for the 'NYRB' in its heyday, and her seminal essay, 'On Photography' is duly excerpted by Scorsese to insightful effect (along with an hilarious public needling of Norman Mailer). She had a platform of her own elsewhere at Doc/Fest in the form of Nancy Kates' frustrating exercise in biographical investigation, *Regarding Susan Sontag*, a film

that swerved opportunities for analysis — both personal and professional — at almost every turn. Seemingly wary of pursuing any of the criticisms that arose in her wealth of access to Sontag's former lovers and colleagues, Kates offers a swift (and aesthetically self-regarding) history of the cultural ethnographer's life that proved far too eager to place its emphasis on the sexual identity of a complex figure who spent a life rejecting such reductive pigeon-holing at every turn.

More on Sontag's cinematic forays would have been fascinating, yet the short extracts from 'Regarding the Pain of Others' and, once again, 'On Photography' did make one wonder what she would have made of the Bergen-Belsen liberation footage seen for the first time in 70 years in Andre Singer's powerful *Night Will Fall*. Would such an authoritative commentator on the consumption of the image have sided with Claude Lanzmann in his resistance to the use of such heart-breaking archive footage for his own landmark documentary, *Shoah*?

One thing both the 'NYRB' and the Sontag films did suggest was that the old-fashioned intelligentsia is something of a dying breed, one commentator not failing to see the irony in his description of her grandiosity in her latter years as 'camp'. Yet the next generation of cultural analysts couldn't fail to draw inspiration from the

sheer wealth of passion and dignity that brimmed from Steve James' film on critic Roger Ebert, *Life Itself*. It's a film which brings the prolific writer's love for words and pictures vividly and energetically to life. It's also wonderful, from one of the great documentary filmmakers, guaranteed to break as many hearts as it makes soar.

Yet if there was one film at Doc/Fest that took the power of words and ideas to a different level, it was Göran Olsson's remarkable *Concerning Violence*. A fearless call to arms of deceptive visual simplicity, it's an archival montage in the vein of his earlier *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975*. Taking the vital 1961 text on the dehumanisation imparted by colonialism, 'The Wretched of the Earth', by Martinique-born cultural theorist Frantz Fanon as it's central thesis, it's a startling, challenging work of art that forces you to sit up straight and watch hard. Every sentence of Lauryn Hill's narration carries the weight and authority of necessary truths. When Sontag's famous words, "the white race is the cancer of the human race", appeared onscreen in her documentary on the final day, it was hard not think back to the poetic eloquence of Fanon on the first: "The European game is finally over," he says at the end of *Concerning Violence*. "Humanity is waiting for something different from us. We must find something else." 🍷

Dude, Where's My Car?

DIRECTED BY
Danny Leiner

STARRING
*Ashton Kutcher,
Seann William Scott,
Jennifer Garner*

TRAILERS
*The Lawn Wrestler,
Tequila Mockingbirds,
Fat Worm Blows a
Sparky, Coconut Capers*

CHERRYPICK
*"Those double-crossing,
sexy-sexy sluts have been
embezzling my pizzas!"*



TAGLINE

*'After a night they can't remember comes
a day they'll never forget.'*

(2000)

FEATURE

It was Spring Break and I was down in Fort Lauderdale, assistant producing a series of 'underwear confessionals' for Fox News. In a vain attempt to keep my raging chakras aligned, I was reading a lot of classical Greek literature. In fact, I was pounding my way through a well-thumbed Homer when who should roll up the gangplank of my rented yacht, but my old amigo Robbie Coltrane — in town to film a walk-on for *Miami Vice*.

So we snorted a whole bunch of killer skunkweed, downed a flotilla of virgin Sea Breezes and nearly went to a "titty bar". But the eureka moment came early the next day when a hungover and uncomprehending Robbie stared out across the marina parking-lot and bellowed, "Some c***s nicked my motor!" Sometimes, when the universe whispers, all you have to do is listen...

On the flight to Burbank, Robbie's incandescent fury kindled a fire beneath the steaming cauldron of my imagination. Homer's 'Odyssey'; Spring Break; skunkweed; a lost car... It had to fit together. But how? The answer came in the form of an old producer's trick gleaned from watching endless Jerry Bruckheimer interviews. So it was that after borrowing a line from a Bruce Springsteen song, 'Barefoot on Reagan's Highway', and the plot of forgotten French movie *Où est le Voiture de Pauline?*, I arrived at an outline for *Dude, Where's My Caravan?* — a title we later revised.

Minutes after touchdown I was meeting with Jeff Mossberg, Head of DVD (Rentals) at Fox. I had resisted hiring a writer to flesh out my core idea — one thing I'd learned during my seven months in Hollywood was that, sometimes, you just have to let those scripts write themselves. It was the concept that hooked Jeff in. But nobody had ever done a raunchy 'stoner' comedy before, and Jeff had a few notes. The film must contain no drugs and no sex. We had to feature a 'Ball-busting Transsexual Stripper' character and find a part for

Jeff's girlfriend — luckily, we were able to kill two birds with one stone there. We also had to include a troupe of Danish exercise fetishists he'd met under Santa Monica pier. Lastly, the film had to come in at under 74 minutes. We were in business.

Casting went equally smoothly. I'd seen Seann William Scott playing Joe Buck opposite Henry Winkler's Ratso Rizzo in a touring production of *Midnight Cowboy*. Ashton Kutcher was Jeff's pool-boy — something the crew mercilessly ribbed him for until AK had the bulk of them fired. Together they developed a powerful chemistry which helped steer them through the intricacies of Homer's wacky plotting. Towards the end of filming, we brought in a director.

Editing was a delight. We simply cut together all our rushes in the order we'd shot them. Kubrick worked the same way, I'm told. Then it was on to the score, which proved contentious. Some critics claimed it sounded like a compilation CD of late-'90s one-hit wonders plucked from a gas station bargain-bin. Not true: I'd found it in the glovebox of a hire-car in Gdansk while location scouting for Pam Anderson's *Barb Wire*. Other reviewers were crueller still, with the *Waco Proclaimer* claiming that the film resembled 'a Republican Party anti-drug scarum transmuted into a nonsensical Hollywood parody of itself.' I can assure you that is less than 60 per cent accurate.

The film went on to make \$74m at the US box-office. Jeff and I lost any profits investing in a dotcom start-up that specialised in inflatable kennels. Jeff committed suicide shortly thereafter.

LWLies would like to thank Tinseltown Press for permission to reprint this extract from *'Abraham's Finger: When Hollywood Chooses You'* by Rusty Colback 🐉

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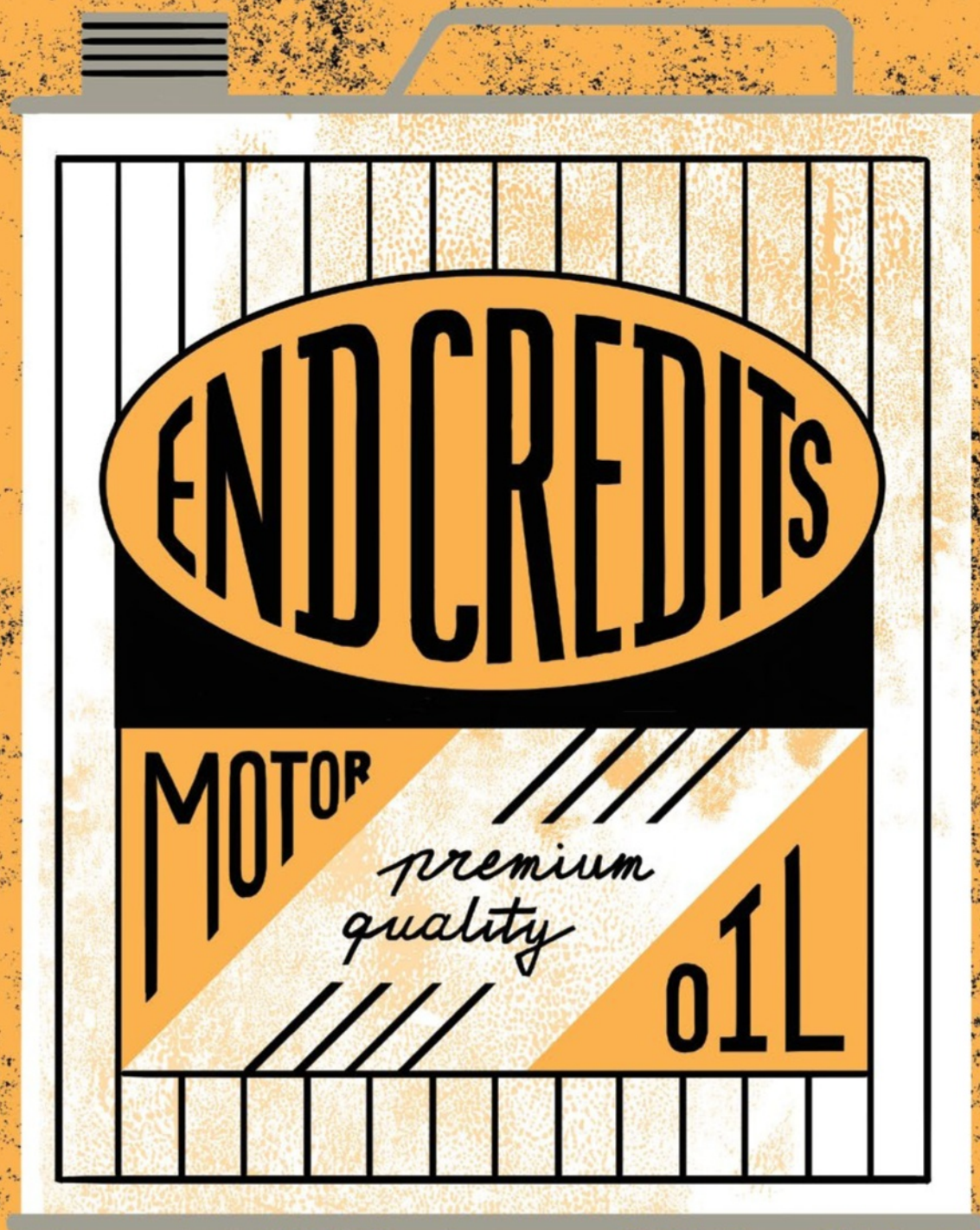
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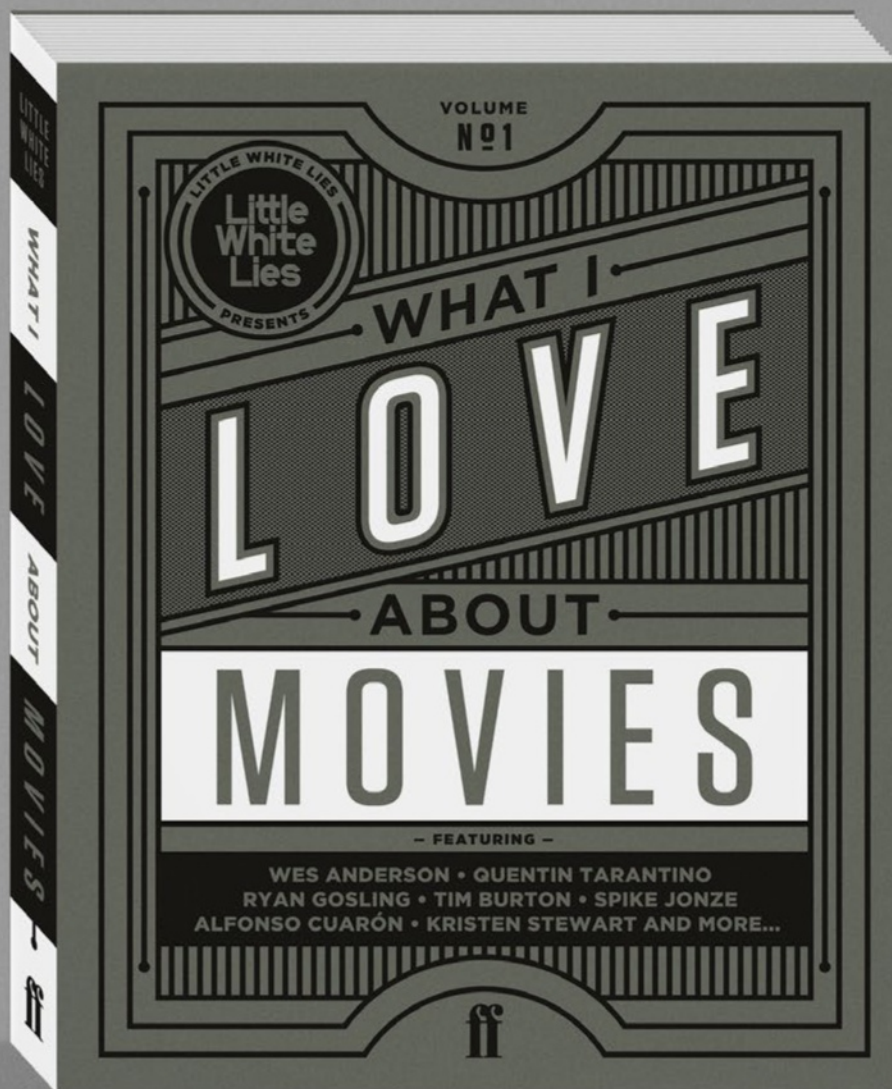
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LWLies:

What do you love about movies?

David Michôd:

The thing I love about them is that they are a grand mash of all the artforms. That's true of watching them and making them for me. I love reading and writing and I get to do that for a time until suddenly I'm in a world of design and photography and performance. And then I'm in a world of sound and music and where the two intersect. It's an amazing job.

Guy Pearce:

There's lots of different things that I love about movies. I suppose it's such an assault on your senses on so many levels. It's the idea of entering a world and being completely submerged in someone else's imagination. When films work well I think they're incredibly evocative and affecting.

Robert Pattinson:

When I first realised I really wanted to be involved in the industry I remember watching *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and for some reason wanting to be that character afterwards. Pretending to be something else gives you confidence, even if it's a false confidence and just for a second. I think it stays with you afterwards. I remember watching that and watching *A Clockwork Orange* and they both did the same thing. I was extremely shy when I was a kid. That movie, for some bizarre reason, had me dressing up as Randle McMurphy.





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